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Cross-examining the Effects of Portfolio Assessment on Genre-based Writing: English as a Foreign Language Learner Engagement on Focus

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Abstract

Due to inconclusive evidence for the differential impacts of portfolio assessment (PA) on genre-based writing improvement and learner engagement, this study cross-examined 46 EFL undergraduates' descriptive and narrative writing performances in a 12-week PA design. Teacher feedback points were collected from consecutive formative assessments of the students' descriptive and narrative writing according to the genre-specific indicators in the West Virginia Department of Education descriptive writing rubric and Smarter Balanced narrative writing rubric, respectively. Statistical results reported the significant impact of PA on improving accurate word choice and grammar, development, and organization of ideas in session-wise students' descriptive writing, with no sign of improvement in their performance on post-test descriptive writing. Further, the positive impact of PA was supported by improving the components of elaboration of narrative, language and vocabulary, organization, and convention in session-wise students' narrative writing, as well as their performance on post-test narrative writing. Qualitative data on students' engagement in PA was collected from inductive content analysis of their reflective journals. Students' self-reports were schematized, and their level of engagement was rendered in terms of their approval of the usefulness and novelty of PA, the frequent mismatch between student self-assessment and teacher feedback both in quality and quantity, the sensitivity of teacher feedback to some writing features over others, the applicability of teacher feedback to the revision process, and overall positive perception of writing improvement.

Keywords: Assessment, Descriptive, Genre-based, Narrative, Portfolio, Writing

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1. Introduction

Since the early 1990s, assessment for learning (AfL) has reached a worldwide audience for improving teaching and learning in an educational context (Farrell, 2024; Lam, 2015). Several studies have examined how AfL might benefit second/foreign language (L2) teaching pedagogy, language learning, and L2 learner performance (Alavi et al., 2024; Campbell-Evans, 2000). As Sadler (2010) conceptualized, AfL in language classroom needs the L2 learners' perception of a gap between a long-term goal and their status quo, as well as their commitment to bridge the gap to attain the goal. Ideally, either language learners will engage in self-assessment to generate information about the gap, or the teachers will explore it and provide feedback about it to the students. Ultimately, the action to close the gap will be taken by the fully engaged students in the process of learning (Sadler, 2010). But in reality, L2 teachers and learners have more critical steps to take. In AfL practice, the teacher needs to reinforce the capacity of the students to engage, discover the gap diligently, and take full responsibility for carrying out remedial actions. Thus, L2 learner self-engagement is not an option; it is a survival kit. However, the focus on learner engagement is not a common practice in most L2 classrooms, as the majority of language teachers do not welcome such shared responsibilities with students (Alderson et al., 2013). In essence, as Black and Wiliam (2018) rightfully disputed, the practicality of AfL at the language learning classroom level has remained insufficient and more evidence is needed to support the real benefits of various types of AfL, including portfolio assessment.

Portfolio assessment (PA), as a common platform of AfL, largely demands L2 learners to actively engage in self-assessment and self-reflection (Lam, 2014) for reaching a closure in the learning gaps. This is advised through redrafting and writing reflective journals (Hamp-Lyons, 2016; Lam & Lee, 2010). Yet, the full practice of PA in L2 setting has faced massive problems, such as teachers' AfL malpractice (Harris & Brown, 2009) or lack of learner self-engagement (Lee & Coniam, 2013). Therefore, Hyland and Hyland (2006) called for more research on PA's impact on learning writing skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings.

Some research examined the teachers' experience with various models of PA (i.e., progress, workshop, and showcase (Pourdana, 2022), the effects of PA on boosting L2 learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Azizpour et al., 2023), and learner text revision strategies (Hamp-Lyon &

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Condon, 2000). However, research findings on how teacher portfolio assessment might impact L2 learner engagement in genre-based writing have remained unclear with limited empirical evidence (Li, 2010). In the same vein, while the use of a portfolio approach to collect student performance on different genres of writing has been well-reported in L1 writing (Hyland, 2007), the contribution of portfolio assessment to EFL learners' genre-based writing performance is largely under-documented (Keshanchi et al., 2022). To void the gap in the literature, this study aimed to set a genre-based PA platform to investigate the role of teacher formative assessment in EFL learners' degree of engagement in descriptive and narrative writing progress.

2. Literature Review

A writing portfolio is a collection from a large body of students' written works, often endorsed with reflection pieces of writing by the students. As a popular platform for self-regulated learning and evaluation, portfolio assessment (PA) is often assumed a better-quality alternative to traditional, product-oriented assessment for improving student writing performance and long-term learner engagement (Kazemi et al., 2022). However, as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) argued, "the portfolio has simply been accepted on faith, on writing specialists' feeling that the portfolio is better" (p. 277). Despite reported educational benefits, PA has remained controversial when utilized in classroom situations, namely due to L2 teachers in flexibility (Nour et al., 2021), insufficient and unwilling student engagement (Pourdana, 2023), a complicated and holistic grading system (Pourdana, 2022), and a lack of school support (Lam, 2018b).

As Lam (2018b) indicated, since writing portfolios are reported to sustain students' close attention to their own progress in writing, their active engagement in teacher feedback is central (Pourdana & Asghari, 2021). Furthermore, for a powerful PA experience, L2 writing teachers should prime such student self-reflectiveness. On the other side of the aisle, however; evidence of how well students comprehend and engage in working portfolios in L2 context is still anecdotal and under-researched (Pourdana & Rad, 2017). To reach confidence in student engagement and self-assessment in PA, L2 writing teachers may need to 'scaffold' the students in terms of tutorials on the entire portfolio process (Pourdana et al., 2014), using examples and prompts (Pourdana & Rafi, 2023), extending deadlines to sustain their engagement (Willis, 2011), and training them to write assessment rubrics. Romova and Andrew (2011) emphasized the critical role of self-assessment practice in PA as it warps student persistence, academic engagement (Rafi et al., 2022), and ultimate achievement in PA.

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Successful engagement depends on how well L2 learners understand the goals of PA, how soon they picture the distance between their status and the goals, and what they do to reach the goals. In other words, learner engagement is the bread and butter for effective learning, yet the topic has been overlooked in mainstream research on PA (Steen-Utheima & Hopfenbeck, 2018).

Apart from controversies over its aftermath in a language learning context, PA is still assumed as a powerful pedagogical and assessment alternative, mostly because it reinforces the L2 learners' "understanding of writing as a socially-situated process in academic discourse communities" (Duff, 2010, p. 169). In doing so, genre-based writing PA can assess both microscopic (i.e., mechanical, formal) and macroscopic (i.e., textural, discursive) aspects in L2 learner writing progress. Learning writing genres such as narrative, descriptive, or expository is one of the critical issues of all times in SLA research (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). Hyland (2003) celebrated engagement in the genre-based writing process as empowering, dialogic, and systematic metacognitive awareness in language learners. Adopting a genre-based approach, Hinkel (2002) also suggested that to develop effective written discourse, EFL students should master "the mechanical aspects of composing sentences, paragraphs, and larger units of discourse that correspond to the dominant genres of the academy, a specific field, or both" (p. 57).

While the process approach has an eye on the L2 writers' overflow of ideas, the genre-based approach has switched its focus to the socio-literacy of the L2 writers in generating real texts that properly address the target discourse community (Hyland, 2003). While Badger and White (2000) believed that the product, process, and genre-based approaches to writing interplay, Romova and Andrew (2011) argued that the genre-based approach only integrates with the process approach, by "adding focus on text/context, and emphasizing the role of language in written communication" (p. 114). Hamp-Lyons (2016) argued that writing PA can benefit with such 'genre-process nexus' approach.

A genre-based approach to the analysis of written narrative is no longer the sole responsibility of literary studies. Narrative analysis has entered the realm of human sciences and professional practice, including psychology and learning L2 writing (Esfandiari & Noor, 2018; Soodmand Afshar et al., 2018; Tavakoli et al., 2011). Assumed as an art or gift of storytelling, narration is made through every minute of every day in our life, so that we make narration plenty of times. Written narrative is a system of gradual development through which the writer entertains with the logical sequence of ideas and events. Narration is mostly done to maintain the readers' interest in a given event or personal experience narrative (PEN) (Labov, 2001). In the same vein, the descriptive genre of writing gives certain attributes to a person,

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place or chain of events in detail. Such entities should be described in such a way that the reader can capture the topic and enter the writer's experience. Descriptive writing is considered as a means to improve other genres of writing such as narrative and expository or perhaps as a dominant strategy in writing academic texts (Birjandi & Hadidi Tamjid, 2012).

In line with the genre-based approach to PA, EFL learners may have a chance to engage in gaining control over a variety of genre-based writing such as narrative and descriptive in the target discourse. However, literature on PA mostly pertained to general writing in L1 (Hamp-Lyons, 2016) or in L2 (Pourdana & Tavassoli, 2022), with a marginal focus on the L2 learners' genre-based writing performance, their weaknesses, and their goals. Therefore, an urge to further research on this topic was strongly felt, particularly in the EFL context.

3. This Study

To bridge the gap in the research literature of portfolio assessment, this study investigated the impacts of genre-based portfolio assessment on 46 EFL undergraduate students' engagement in descriptive and narrative writing process. The academic goal for choosing descriptive genre of writing was to examine EFL students' ability in describing tables, figures, flowcharts and other course-related writings at university level. Likewise, the academic goal for choosing narrative genre of writing was to observe EFL students' performance on reporting the stepwise experimental procedures in their term projects or scientific reports. Moreover, EFL students' engagement was conceptualized as a 'metaconstruct' or a framework in which the student's regular self-assessment, critical thinking, motivation, self-efficacy, and enthusiasm were integrated to achieve the learning goals (Fredricks et al., 2004).

The research design was a 12-week genre-based PA, in which the distribution of teacher formative assessment was obtained once-a-week on the students' descriptive and narrative written scripts. The student engagement was assessed through the students' submitted reflective journals. To this end, the following research questions were raised:

RQ1: Does teacher portfolio assessment have any impact on EFL learners' genre-based descriptive writing?

RQ2: Does teacher portfolio assessment have any impact on EFL learners' genre-based narrative writing?

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RQ3: What are the EFL learners' perceptions of the genre-based portfolio assessment, teacher feedback, and their writing improvement?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A sample of 46 EFL undergraduates studying different university majors (architecture, economy, mathematics, and MBA) took part in this study. They were sophomore students at an Islamic Azad University branch in Iran. A non-random purposive sampling method was adopted in this study, because selecting a representative group of university students with adequate experience in genre-based writing in English was the researcher's plan.

Table 1. *Demographic Information of the Participants*

Participant	Gender	Age	University Major	Studying/Teaching English (Year)	OPT Range of Score
EFL Students n = 46	Female, (30) 65%	20–24, (23) 56.5% 25–31, (20) 43.5%	Architecture (23) 50% Economy (11) 24% Mathematics (6) 13% Accounting (6) 13%	3–4, (30) 65% 5–6, (16) 35%	30–33, (31) 67% 34–37, (15) 33%
EFL teacher (1)	Female	26	ELT	6	
Assistant Researchers (3)	Female, (2) 66.6%	24–37	ELT	4–7	

The selected participants in this study had already performed at least 10 genre-based writing tasks, such as writing an invitation card, a shopping list, a letter of application, or travel journals as partial requirements in previous English writing courses. Their participation was voluntary and no payment was granted to them. Their experience in learning English was between 3 to 6 years (m = 5) and their ages ranged from 20 to 31 (m = 25.5). Their general English proficiency level was measured by administering a 2004 version of the Oxford Placement Test, and determined at the intermediate level (30–37, B1 in OPT ranking system) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .812$, representing strong test reliability).

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Additionally, four MA graduates of English language teaching (ELT) took part in this research as the EFL teacher (n = 1) and assistant researchers (n = 3) who provided feedback to the students' descriptive and narrative writing, co-rated them and analyzed the content of their reflective journals. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the participants.

4.2 West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) Descriptive Writing Rubric

The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) rubric meets the criteria for assessing descriptive writing in the EFL context, by defining reasonable cut-off scores to ensure a reliable impression of student performance in English. The WVDE analytic rubric consists of five components of organization, development, sentence structure, word choice and grammar, and mechanics, within the 1–6 band scores, ranging from 1 (Minimal) to 6 (Exemplary) spectrums. 'Organization' entails a clear and logical progression of ideas in descriptive writing. 'Development' is the writer's focus on the intended audience through the strong use of examples, relevant details, analogies, and illustrations. 'Sentence structure' refers to the use of well-constructed sentences of various structures. 'Word choice and grammar' is the writer's choice of vivid words and grammatical phrases. Finally, 'mechanics' of writing refers to the systematic use of punctuation, capitalization, and grammar in writing (NBCT Office of Assessment West Virginia Department of Education, 2015). In this study, the WVDE descriptive writing rubric was selected for both teacher feedback and students' self-assessment of their descriptive writing performance. The reason behind adopting this rubric was its user-friendliness, clarity of rubric indicators, and creditability.

4.3 Smarter Balanced Narrative Writing Rubric

In 2014, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and Tulare County Office of Education created a digital library of formative assessment tools to support students and teachers. A Smarter Balanced narrative writing rubric has since been used to assess language learners' narrative writing. This analytic rubric consists of five categories: narrative focus, organization, elaboration of narrative, language vocabulary and conventions. 'Narrative focus' refers to the writer's effective establishment of a setting, narrator and/or characters. 'Organization' entails creating an effective plot that demands unity and completeness. 'Elaboration of narrative' refers to the narrator's thorough and effective elaboration of a narration by using details and dialogues. 'Language and vocabulary' refer to the writer's deliberate choice of words and structures that express personal experience or events. Finally, 'convention' indicates

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the effective and consistent use of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling in narration (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012). The Smarter Balanced narrative rubric has a 1–5 band score, ranging from 0 (No evidence of the ability to write a narrative) to 5 (Meeting all the criteria of writing a real or imagined narrative). In this study, teacher feedback and students' self-assessment of narrative writing were conducted with reference to the Smarter Balanced narrative writing rubric. The logic behind selecting this rubric was its clear-cut band scores and user-friendliness which made it more accessible to students' self-assessment.

4.4 Genre-based Elicitation Writing Tasks

For 12 weeks, the participants were required to write and revise their descriptive and narrative drafts through their self-assessment, and regular teacher feedback. To select and incorporate the 12 most favorable topics into descriptive and narrative elicitation writing tasks, a topic familiarity checklist was prepared by the researcher and distributed among the participants. To maintain the variety, the researcher split the descriptive and narrative writing tasks and assigned them into odd and even weeks. For summative assessment purposes, the initial descriptive and narrative tasks in weeks 1 and 2 were labeled as the descriptive and narrative pretests, and the final descriptive and narrative tasks in weeks 11 and 12 were named as the descriptive and narrative post-tests. The topics and arrangement of the tasks are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of the Genre-based Elicitation Writing Tasks*

Session	Genre	Topic
1	Descriptive	What are your reading habits? *(Descriptive Pretest)*
2	Narrative	What was your best vacation? *(Narrative Pretest)*
3	Descriptive	How do you play with your smartphone?
4	Narrative	What was the last time you went to a museum?
5	Descriptive	What type of games do you like most?
6	Narrative	What do you remember from your childhood?
7	Descriptive	How do you like your university?
8	Narrative	What do you remember from the last wedding reception you were invited?
9	Descriptive	How do you look for a mobile application?
10	Narrative	What does your life look like without your family?
11	Descriptive	How do you clean your room? *(Descriptive Post-test)*
12	Narrative	What do you remember from the worst day of your life? *(Narrative Post-test)*

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4.5 Student Reflective Journal

Reflective journals were written by the students after receiving the teacher feedback on their every written script and revising it accordingly. They were required to respond to four prompts in their reflective journal about the writing task of the week. The prompts were prepared by the researcher and distributed in hard copies in order to collect data about how the participants engage in their (1) experience with the writing portfolio system, (2) understanding of received teacher feedback, (3) ability to use teacher feedback in their revised drafts, and (4) perception of writing improvement. The students were free to write in English or Persian (students' L1). As a result, in the submitted reflective journals, around 700 words were collaboratively translated into English by the assistant researchers. The word limit in reflective journals was 500. Therefore, a corpus of around 276,000 words (46*500*12) was submitted to document analysis by the assistant researchers (Cohen's kappa (κ) = .830, interpreted as strong inter-rater reliability). From the written responses to every prompt, frequent themes were extracted and counted every time a similar word or concept was encountered during the content analysis.

4.6 Data Collection

The logistics of writing PA comprises four steps of collection, selection, reflection, and teacher-delayed evaluation. However, the researchers are allowed to modify this framework to make it compatible to the purpose of the research or to cope with other limiting contextual factors (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2016). In a typical portfolio, 'collection' is the gradual compilation of students' multiple written drafts. 'Selection' is the student's self-collection of their best pieces of work for the teacher's final grading. Usually, in terms of reflective essays, 'reflection' is the student's self-assessment and self-reflection of their own personal and learning experience. 'Delayed evaluation' is assigning grades on the final written drafts by the teacher. In this study, 'selection' was deliberately omitted to collect as much data on reflective journals as possible.

Two days before the study began, an OPT was administered as the placement test in order to normalize the selected participants for their English proficiency level. Next, the researcher provided all the participants (including the EFL teacher and assistant researchers) with an 8-hour tutorial on (1) the frameworks of descriptive and narrative writing by presenting two anchor essays, (2) the two selected rubrics for descriptive and narrative writing assessment (i.e., WVDE descriptive writing rubric and Smarter Balanced narrative writing rubric), and (3) the process of writing reflective journals by responding to the four prompts set for all the writing tasks in the portfolio system. The EFL teacher,

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assistant researchers and students and were presented with a brief discussion to the nature of teacher feedback in terms of comments, evaluation, or suggestions they could give/receive without assigning grades to the writings.

The 12-week writing course was divided into six odd sessions devoted to descriptive writing tasks and six even sessions to narrative writing tasks, every second week. The participants were required to write a 300-word essay on the assigned topic of the week, followed by their self-assessment before they submitted their written draft to the teacher. They were allowed to consult the selected rubrics during their writing and self-assessment. Drafting and self-assessment lasted for 60 minutes. At the end of every session, the teacher collected the papers and provided her handwritten comments, corrections or suggestions with reference to the selected rubrics, and in collaboration with assistant researchers. Every comment, correction or suggestion made on the student written drafts was considered as one 'feedback point' and the total feedback points for every draft of writing were calculated. The commented papers were returned to the students in the following week. The students were required to revise their first draft according to the received feedback, and to write a 500-word reflective journal on their personal and learning experience, in terms of responses to the prompts. The revised drafts and reflective journals were stored by the participants for their portfolio compilation and teacher delayed evaluation. By the end of the course, the teacher evaluated the portfolios in holistic approach by assigning them the letters A, B or C, based on the overall quality of the revised final drafts and completeness of the submitted portfolios.

To summative assess the student post-intervention writing performance, the assistant researchers scored the descriptive and narrative pre- and post-tests by counting the feedback points, with reference to the writing rubrics. The weekly teacher feedback, summative assessment of the student genre-based writing, and content analysis of the reflective journals were carried out collaboratively by the EFL teacher and assistant researchers. The whole process was supervised by the researcher in the study. In cases of rating or coding disagreement, ongoing negotiation was carried out until an agreement was reached on every occasion. The inter-rater reliability indices were calculated for a variety of ratings in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .800$, reliability index for descriptive writing tasks; Cronbach's $\alpha = .981$, reliability index for narrative writing tasks; Cronbach's $\alpha = .881$, reliability index for descriptive writing pre and post-test scores; Cronbach's $\alpha = .931$, reliability index for narrative writing pre and post-test scores). All values of Cronbach's alpha represented strong agreement and statistically significant ($p < .05$). It should be noted that, the observed decrease in teacher feedback points was interpreted as the student progress in their writing.

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To analyze and interpret the collected qualitative data of reflective journals, the EFL teacher and assistant researchers carried out the inductive content analysis of the complied reflective journals over the course of 12 weeks. They schematized and reported the extracted themes out of the responses to the prompts (n = 4) set for every descriptive and narrative writing task.

5. Results

5.1 Impact of Genre-based PA on Students' Descriptive Writing

Before running statistical tests, descriptive statistics and the assumption of normality were examined for the feedback points on six tasks of descriptive writing.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics and Test of Normality: Descriptive Writing Tasks*

Week	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
1(Pretest)	18	92	19.19	8.167	1.386	.564	1.366	1.091
3	20	88	20.31	8.522	.870	.564	1.649	1.091
5	8	88	17.69	10.005	1.027	.564	1.048	1.091
7	30	66	21.81	6.145	.858	.564	− .231	1.091
9	24	54	15.88	4.225	1.197	.564	1.629	1.091
11(Post-test)	20	66	17.44	6.271	.990	.564	.842	1.091

As displayed in Table 3, the mean of feedback points decreased from Task 1 (m = 19.19) to Task 11 (m = 17.44), which was interpreted as a slight improvement in student performance on descriptive writing tasks. The dispersion of the feedback points was also narrowed from Task 1 (SD = 8.167) to Task 11 (SD = 6.271), which suggested an increasing uniformity in the students' descriptive writing performance along the course. The assumption of the normality of the data was not violated, since the measures of skewness and kurtosis fell within the range of ± 2.00 (George & Mallery, 2010). To statistically examine the differences between the students' performance on a descriptive writing pretest in Week 1 and the post-test in Week 11, the researcher calculated a paired-samples t-test.

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Table 4. *Paired Samples T-Test: Pretest and Post-test of Descriptive Writing Tasks*

Paired Differences					*t*	*df*	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
			Lower	Upper			
1.750	4.782	1.195	− .798	4.298	1.464	45	.164

As seen in Table 4, the results of the paired-samples t-test were insignificant (t (45) = 1.464, p = .164 > .05., 95% CI [-.798, 4.298], r = 0.224, representing a small effect size (Lenhard & Lenhard, 2016)). The findings could be interpreted as the low effect of genre-based PA on students' descriptive writing improvement. To further explore the meaningfulness of the results over the six weeks, a set of one-way repeated measures (RM) ANOVA was conducted (Table 5). Before running RM ANOVA, the researcher calculated Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for the data which indicated that the assumption of sphericity was not violated, χ^2 (44) = .142, p = .627 > .05.

Table 5. *Repeated Measures ANOVA: Six-Week Period of Descriptive Writing Tasks*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Organization						
Between Group	508.760	1	508.760	195.312	.000	.929
Within Group	12.677	5	2.535	2.486	.039	.142
Development						
Between Group	352.667	1	352.667	88.659	.000	.855
Within Group	126.708	5	25.342	10.741	.000	.417
Sentence Structure						
Between Group	748.167	1	748.167	331.700	.000	.957
Within Group	33.833	5	6.767	3.054	.015	.169
Word choice & Grammar						
Between Group	4056.000	1	4056.000	74.075	.000	.832
Within Group	48.875	5	9.775	2.015	.036	.118
Mechanics						
Between Group	2948.167	1	2948.167	52.037	.000	.776
Within Group	91.208	5	18.242	1.893	.106	.112

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As Table 5 illustrates, the teacher feedback points on all five components of descriptive writing showed significant differences, including the weekly mean scores of 'organization" ($F(1, 5) = 195.312$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .929$), 'development' ($F(1, 5) = 88.659$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .855$), 'sentence structure' ($F(1, 5) = 331.700$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .957$), 'word choice & grammar' ($F(1, 5) = 74.075$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .832$), and 'mechanics' (F (1, 5), 52.037, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .776$). All the measures of partial η^2 were interpreted as strong effect sizes (Lenhard, & Lenhard, 2016).

5.2 Impact of Genre-based PA on Students' Narrative Writing

Once again, descriptive statistics and the assumption of normality for the feedback points on six tasks of narrative writing were tested.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics and Test of Normality: Narrative Writing Tasks*

Week	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
2 (Pretest)	42	94	28.25	9.581	1.176	.564	−.108	1.091
4	34	80	25.88	6.313	.563	.564	.207	1.091
6	36	140	26.38	12.675	1.009	.564	0.376	1.091
8	20	156	20.94	15.889	1.861	.564	1.821	1.091
10	20	72	18.69	7.922	.863	.564	.234	1.091
12 (Post-test)	24	64	18.06	5.859	.950	.564	.387	1.091

As seen in Table 6, the mean of feedback points largely decreased in number from Task 2 ($m = 28.25$) to Task 12 ($m = 18.06$), which was interpreted as notable progress in students' performance on narrative writing tasks. The dispersion of the feedback points was also largely shrunk from Task 2 ($SD = 9.581$) to Task 12 ($SD = 5.859$) to show an increasing homogeneity in the students' narrative writing. In terms of the normal distribution of the data, the measures of skewness and kurtosis were within the range of ± 2.00, which maintained the normality of the data. To examine the progress in students' narrative writing, the researcher conducted the paired-samples t-test between students' performance on a narrative pretest in Week 2 and a post-test in Week 12.

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Table 7. *Paired Samples T-Test: Pretest and Post-test of Narrative Writing Tasks*

Paired Differences					*t*	*df*	Sig.
Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				(2-tailed)
			Lower	Upper			
10.188	11.053	2.763	4.298	16.077	3.687	45	.002

In Table 7, the results of the paired-samples t-test were significant ($t(45) = 3.687$, $p = .002 > .05$., 95% CI [4.298, 16.077], $r = 1.281$, representing a large effect size). They were interpreted as the positive impact of PA on student narrative writing improvement in a six-week period. To further explore the meaningfulness of the results over the six weeks, a set of one-way repeated measures (RM) ANOVA was conducted (Table 8). Before running RM ANOVA, the researcher calculated Mauchly's Test of Sphericity for the data which indicated that the assumption of sphericity was not violated $\chi^2(44) = .088$, $p = .505 > .05$.

Table 8. Repeated *Measures ANOVA: Six-Week Period of Narrative Writing Tasks*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Narrative focus						
Between Group	1488.375	1	1488.375	64.908	.000	.812
Within Group	372.625	5	74.525	8.774	.000	.369
Organization						
Between Group	481.510	1	481.510	774.721	.000	.981
Within Group	22.552	5	4.510	7.105	.000	.321
Elaboration of narrative						
Between Group	10.333	5	2.067	2.598	.032	.848
Within Group	210.042	1	210.042	263.467	.000	.946
Language and vocabulary						
Between Group	870.010	1	870.010	169.139	.000	.919
Within Group	48.552	5	9.710	3.618	.006	.194
Convention						
Between Group	15887.760	1	15887.760	90.326	.000	.858
Within Group	145.177	5	29.035	1.253	.013	.077

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In Table 8, significant differences can be observed in the teacher feedback points on all five components of narrative writing, including the weekly mean scores of 'narrative focus' ($F(1, 5) = 64.908$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .812$), 'organization' ($F(1, 5) = 774.721$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .981$), 'elaboration of narrative' ($F(1, 5) = 2.598$, $p = .032 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .848$), 'language and vocabulary' ($F(1, 5) = 169.139$, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .919$), and 'convention' (F (1, 5), 90.326, $p = .000 < .05$, $\eta^2 = .858$). All the measures of partial η^2 were interpreted as strong effect sizes.

5.3 Analysis of the Student Reflective Journals

An inductive content analysis was carried out with the 46 EFL students' self-reported reflective journals over the 12 weeks of portfolio assessment. As Table 9 summarizes, the inductive analysis of the responses to the given prompts resulted in eleven themes. The themes were extracted and categorized according to the response prompts. The majority of responses to the first prompt, which asked for students' reflections on their learning and personal experiences with PA, agreed upon the successful and positive impact of PA (62.5%). 33.68% of the responses pointed to the novelty of their experience with PA, and only 3.81% of them expressed their frustration with working in the portfolio system.

The encoded themes for the second prompt summarized a large proportion of the student critical engagement in the teacher feedback. 54.12% of the responses expressed an unexpected mismatch between the student self-assessment and the received teacher feedback, both in number, in type, and in feedback focus. More specifically, the students observed a sensitivity or bias in teacher assessment towards certain form-focused components in their writing such as mechanics or choice of words, at the expense of feedback to macro-components of organization or development of ideas (45.87%). Students believed that such a tendency in teacher feedback narrowed down their focus to prioritize improving certain types of committed errors.

In the third prompt which asked for students' reflections on the applicability of teacher feedback in their revision process, almost half of the respondents agreed on its usefulness (50.13%). The students also were satisfied with their experience of learning discourse features such as cohesive devices, generating 'good ideas' in writing, and their gradual alignment to genre conventions. Yet a large number of responses pointed to the teacher comments as incomprehensible, difficult to apply (26.38%), or inadequate (23.48%). The last prompt required the students' self-evaluation of their writing progress, to which the majority of the students positively responded (74.16%). 21.03% of the responses pointed to

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partial improvement of their writing, and only 4.79% of them found portfolio assessment as ineffective to their writing betterment.

Table 9. *Distribution of the Extracted Themes in Student Reflective Journals*

Prompt 1: What do you think about keeping a writing portfolio in general?		
Exemplar response	Theme	F (Percentage)
- I like it that I have a chance to correct my mistakes. - Interesting! I haven't done it before. - I don't like it much because I will revise my writing again and again!	Effectiveness Novelty Uselessness	180 (62.5%) 97 (33.68%) 11 (3.81%)
Prompt 2: What do you think about the (quality and/or quantity) of the teacher feedback on your draft?		
- Usually, I get more feedback than I expect. - I think she [the teacher] is more sensitive to my good words than my good ideas!	Mismatch between self-assessment and teacher feedback Feedback bias	118 (54.12%) 100 (45.87%)
Prompt 3: Could you use the teacher feedback when you revised your draft?		
- Her comments are very useful. - I don't understand some of her comments. - I need more help on this assignment.	Usefulness Inapplicability Inadequacy	190 (50.13%) 100 (26.38%) 89 (23.48%)
Prompt 4: What do you think about your writing progress this week?		
- I have learned a lot this week. - I can see some improvement. - I don't see any change yet.	Positive effect Moderate effect No effect	201 (74.16%) 57 (21.03%) 13 (4.79%)

6. Discussion

In line with the purpose of the study, three research questions were raised and explored. In research question 1, the researcher's purpose was to gain insight into the impact of portfolio assessment on student descriptive writing. The analysis of teacher summative assessment indicated no evidence for the positive impact of PA on students' descriptive performance. Yet, further statistical results of one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicated the meaningful impact of PA on the student descriptive writing process,

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despite no observable improvement in their written product on the posttest of descriptive writing. The findings implied that despite the insufficient skills and knowledge of genre-based writing, the students could engage in self-assessment, apply the received teacher feedback, and critically evaluate the quality of their writing from a descriptive-genre perspective. In other words, in the *process* of genre-based portfolio assessment, the students had a chance to receive feedback on both microscopic (such as mechanics of writing or, sentence structure) and macroscopic (such as organization or development of ideas) aspects of descriptive writing (Borg, 2003).

Aligned with this finding, in a case study of the challenges an Indonesian EFL teacher faced in portfolio assessment, Halim and Lestari (2019) also reported improvement in students' descriptive writing despite their low rate of engagement and the teacher's difficulties in supervising the student peer and self-assessment. The findings were in contradiction with Roohani and Taheri (2015), who supported the positive impact of PA on the subskills in student descriptive and expository writing achievement. However, their reported impact on students' choice of words and conventions of writing was interpreted as weak and temporary.

In response to research question 2 which explored the impact of portfolio assessment on student narrative writing, the analysis of data from teacher formative and summative assessments indicated the positive double impacts of PA on improving the student narrative writing process, and on final products in terms of their writing performance on the posttest of narrative writing. In other words, students' writing progress and final achievement suggested their constant reference to the multiple components in the selected writing rubric (i.e., Smarter Balanced narrative writing rubric), close observation of the received teacher commentaries, and successful and systematic application of them to their revised scripts.

The research literature on portfolio assessment and narrative writing dates back to the 1990s. In a case study with 22 EFL students, Shober (1996) conducted a 12-week portfolio assessment and reported contrary results that only 68 percent of the students demonstrated improvement in narrative writing. Twenty-seven percent of the students' scores remained unchanged, and a single student had a 5% decrease in her final score. Shober concluded that portfolio assessment was deficient and ineffective as an evaluation tool. In another case study, Gearhart et al. (1992) adopted a methodological approach to portfolio assessment of 35 English-speaking elementary students' narrative writing. They reported critical issues regarding the efficiency of portfolio assessment as an approach to evaluate students' narrative writing, such as the controversial 'scorability' of the portfolio, disagreements over the 'domains for portfolio assessment', and its 'utility for large-scale assessment'.

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Research question 3 explored the degree of student engagement in portfolio assessment of their descriptive and narrative writing performance. Regarding their general perception of writing portfolio assessment, the majority of the students agreed upon the merits and novelty of their experience. In the same vein, findings by Song and August (2002) showed the positive attitudes of students to PA as a learning tool for EFL writing. The findings in student reflective journals were also in line with several studies that reported the impacts of writing PA on the students' confidence, motivation and positive learning attitude (Afrianto, 2017; Black & Wiliam, 2018; Steen-Utheima & Hopfenbeck, 2018).

Regarding student engagement in the effectiveness of teacher feedback, they reported an incompatibility between the teacher feedback and their self-assessment both in number (e.g., teacher feedback was outnumbered) and in nature (e.g., teacher feedback was more detailed, confusing and repetitive).

The findings were in line with several studies that reported the student failure in making sense of teacher feedback and, their subsequent low attention and required action (Carless, 2011; Pierce et al., 2010). The students also brought up the issue of teacher feedback sensitivity. They reported teacher sensitivity towards certain writing features, such as 'punctuation', 'description of the setting in narrative', 'choice of words', and systematic leniency towards others, such as 'development of supporting ideas' or 'bringing details or examples'. Regarding the assessment practice as a social process, the students and the teacher seem like actors interacting inside a network of mutual expectations where the students tend to 'legitimize' learning and laser-focus those areas in the new language which are bolded in teacher feedback. For example, in a classroom where the teacher's comments often center around the production of correct sentence structures or cosmetic features of the language, students may interpret future feedback on the development of coherent ideas as 'illegitimate' or 'unfair'.

About half of students' perceptions of their ability to use teacher feedback in their revised drafts were positive and satisfactory. The other half pointed to the inapplicability and inadequacy of the teacher feedback. Several other studies on PA reported either the students misinterpreted teacher comments when revising their written drafts or failed to revise them after several re-drafting (Clarke & Boud, 2016), Finally, the majority of the participants in this study reported their writing improvement while participating in the writing portfolio system. The findings were supported in several studies in which the L2 students perceived noticeable writing achievements in a portfolio system (Pourdana & Asghari, 2022), and contradicted in a few others (Lam & Lee, 2010).

7. Conclusion

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This study explored how positively genre-based portfolio assessment could impact the EFL undergraduate students' descriptive and narrative writing performance and how effectively could help them engage, perceive, and act upon teacher formative feedback in the 12-week portfolio assessment platform. It was a one-group, pre-test, post-test study on 46 EFL learners which faced certain limitations in results and implications for future researchers and L2/EFL teachers.

In this study, the participants were selected with non-random purposive sampling to participate in a case study. Consequently, the generalizability of the findings in this research will be limited; yet the insight into how genre-based PA might affect the EFL learners' writing at the university level can provoke further research in educational settings of colleges and universities.

Secondly, the collected data were limited to teacher formative assessment of student writing and the student reflective journals in the 12-week portfolio assessment. The researcher strongly believes that extending the period of data collection could have yielded richer data on the student genre-based writing progress. Moreover, more critical data could be collected from setting elicitation recall or interviewing the EFL teacher and assistant researchers, who were in charge of giving weekly feedback on the student writings.

Thirdly, students' engagement in PA was restricted to their self-reported perceptions in terms of reflective journals. Further research may add peer assessment or active collaboration of students in drafting and revising their texts, as further important sources of data on language learner engagement. Last but not least, no analytical analysis was conducted on the student revision process and their effective application of received teacher feedback, which can be a demanding topic for future research.

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