

The Application of Portfolio to Assess the Writing of EFL Students in Senior School

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Abstract

Evaluation is an important part in the process of English teaching. A scientific assessment method can improve teaching efficiency. The traditional test-oriented assessment tends to reduce students' interest and motivation in English learning. As a form of formative assessment, portfolio assessment focuses on students' learning process rather than learning results, which can play a unique role in students' interest, attitude and ability in English writing. In order to promote a more scientific assessment system and know more about the current situation of the application in portfolio assessment in middle school English writing. This study takes 60 students from Class 2, Grade 1 of Yongnian middle school as the research objects, which aims to analyze the current situation of English writing and the application of portfolio in middle school. From the data of the two questionnaires, it can be concluded that students' interest in writing, writing attitude and writing ability have been significantly improved. The portfolio is an effective measure for teachers to record students' learning process. At the same time, this paper analyzes and summarizes some shortcomings in the evaluation of English writing. Finally, on the basis of this research, this paper puts forward some suggestions for teachers, hoping to solve the problems in the application of portfolio assessment, so as to improve the quality of teaching.

Keywords

Portfolio Assessment; English Writing; Middle School.

1. Introduction

"National English Curriculum Standard" (2017) puts forward that "Evaluation is an important part of English curriculum, and a scientific evaluation system is an important guarantee for the realization of curriculum objectives".¹ In the traditional English teaching mode in China, the summative assessment based on examination plays a leading role in teaching. The teacher-leading classroom focuses on students' learning outcomes. With the new round of curriculum reform, the reform of evaluation is in progress. A new evaluation method combining formative evaluation and summative evaluation is launched. On the other hand, listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic skills that students must master. However, due to the lack of training, Chinese students writing level has not been significantly improved. Therefore, in recent years, portfolio assessment has been introduced into the field of English teaching in China, and many teachers begin to use it to record students' learning process and improve their interest in writing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Definition of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio Assessment is a kind of formative assessment from western countries. However, the definitions of portfolios vary from different perspectives. Generally speaking, the portfolio is often used to collect information or evidence during the learning process, which will be helpful

to the teachers' teaching and students' learning. The teacher can adjust their teaching plan according to their students' performance. From this kind of portfolio, the students can gain a sense of achievement and self-satisfaction.

2.2. Current Situation of Portfolio Assessment in Middle School

Evaluation is an important part of English curriculum, and a scientific evaluation system can promote the realization of curriculum objectives. However, in the traditional middle school English teaching, the summative evaluation with tests as the main way occupies a dominant position. The point obtained by students in the examination has become the standard for most teachers to evaluate students' writing ability. The reference of teacher evaluation is the result of examination, but the students' learning process is ignored. Students' learning is regarded as a mechanical process. In the actual teaching process, the author found that some teachers did not really understand the connotation and role of the portfolio assessment, but regard it as a storage box. They just ask students to follow their instructions step by step. It is very easy to fall into formalism. Next, some teachers are old-fashioned and unwilling to accept new things and new teaching ideas, which leads to the slow development of English in the field of English teaching in China.

In recent years, with the new round of curriculum reform, the new evaluation method of combining formative evaluation and summative evaluation is quietly launched. Many teachers begin to use it to record students' learning process and improve their interest in learning. The portfolio assessment plays an important role in students' English writing.

3. Research Design

3.1. Research Questions

This research will be done based on the previous research and will be designed to confirm the following three questions. The first question is "Can the portfolio arouse students' interest in learning and improve their participation in writing?". The second question is "Can the portfolio improve the students' self-reflection ability and their writing ability?". The third question is "Can portfolio assessment be an effective way for teachers to record students' English learning process?". Furthermore, the author will try to propose some suggestions on writing.

3.2. Research Methods

In this study, the research objects contain two parts, the English teacher and students. There are 60 students from Class 2, Grade 1 of Yongnian middle school in Fushun County. This class is taught by the same teacher, using the same textbook, and the teaching steps of English class are the same. Choosing one class of students as the research object can eliminate the interference of some objective factors.

In this study, the author uses the following two tools to collect data: questionnaire survey, interview. This questionnaire contains 15 basic questions, which can be divided into two parts. The purpose of the first part is to know the basic situation of the students' English writing, including students' writing habits and teachers' assessment methods and so on. The second part can be divided into three dimensions, namely writing interest, writing attitude and writing ability. Each question has five options: A: strongly agree, B: agree, C: general agree, D: disagree, E: strongly disagree. Choice A to E indicate a range of willingness from positive to negative. In this research, the five options from A to E stand for the scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. At the end of the survey, scores for each question were calculated and averaged. This research designed three levels: better level (3.51-5); intermediate level (1.51-3.5); poor level (0-1.5). Finally, the scores of the first questionnaire will be compared with the second one.

Secondly, the author interviewed the teachers in this class. Interviews can overcome the limitations of the questionnaire survey, so that the author can know the situation of students more clearly after the application of the portfolio. The problems, methods and suggestions will be elaborated.

Last but not the least, the class has an English writing practice about once a week. Before the beginning of the new semester, English teachers will introduce the new way of English writing assessment that will be adopted this semester in detail. The connotation, function and implementation steps of the portfolio will be introduced to students in detail before the research. In this process, the cover design of the portfolio, students' learning achievements and all kinds of writing will be collected for reference.

4. Results and Reflection

4.1. Results and Analysis of the questionnaire

For the first part of the questionnaire, it can be clearly concluded that students' attitude and interest towards English writing have changed a lot after a semester of portfolio assessment. Secondly, the author found that more than 58% of the students thought that the lack of vocabulary was the main problem to write a good composition. Although writing is not easy for them, they also lack corresponding special training. More than 71% of the students never write a composition except for completing the exam. This is beyond the author's expectation. Then, there is a lack of communication between teachers and students. 91% of the students reported that teachers usually correct their compositions independently and seldom organize group activities for mutual correction. Students' feedback to teachers is also relatively little. More than 55% of the students only check their scores or grades after getting the teacher's corrected compositions, and rarely make any changes. The last part is about the portfolio assessment. More than half of the students don't know what portfolio is. Only 6% of the students showed interest in it. They are also not interested in whether this new method can improve their English writing.

As for the second part, the first dimension is to check the changes of students' interest in writing. The average of students' interest in writing increased from 2.70 to 3.46, which is at the intermediate level. It means that students have a deeper understanding of the portfolio and think that portfolio can improve their English writing. In the process of portfolio implementation, new forms and means of evaluation make students have fun in writing.

The second dimension is about students' writing attitude. After the implementation of portfolio assessment, the average value of students' writing attitude increases from 2.42 to 3.05, which is at the middle level. This shows that students' attitude towards English writing has changed.

The third dimension is about the students' writing ability. After the implementation of portfolio evaluation, the average of students' writing ability increased from 2.30 to 3.06. This shows that many students have confidence in writing again. They believe that they can write a good composition under the correct guidance of the teachers.

4.2. Results and Analysis of the Interview

In order to understand the whole research process more clearly, the author conducted a special interview with the teacher. From the interview, it can be concluded from the teachers that the traditional English writing class, which is dominated by teachers, is no longer suitable with the development of education. There is a barrier between teachers and students. Learning from each other and making progress have become the basic acquirement of our class."

5. Suggestions to the Middle School English Writing

5.1. Paying Attention to Arousing Students' Interests and Enthusiasm in Learning

Students' interest in learning plays an important role in the teaching of English writing. As teachers, we should first make students want to write, and then teach them how to write. Therefore, stimulating students' interest in English writing has become the first thing teachers should do. As long as students improve their interest in learning, their enthusiasm for learning will be greatly improved. In the writing class, first of all, teachers should select some subjects related to students' real life to write for them. In other words, the content of English writing should be authentic. Students' writing is based on their existing experience, and they are not able to compile some content that has nothing to do with their real life. Secondly, in the process of students' writing, teachers should pay attention to stimulate students' creativity and imagination, and allow all kinds of new ideas to appear. In the process of forming this new viewpoint, students' interest and enthusiasm in writing can be improved.

5.2. Respecting Students' Differences and Allowing the Diversity of Portfolio Content

The content of the portfolio should not be defined as a fixed form, otherwise it will be no different from the traditional evaluation method. After defining the general categories of portfolio, teachers should leave some space for students to play. Each student can put in different things according to their own interests and differences. In addition to some necessary information, the cover of the portfolio should be designed by students themselves. Every student has individual differences. Teachers should give full play to student' subjective initiative on the basis of fully respecting students' individual differences. Only in this way can the contents of the portfolio be more colorful. "In the process of evaluation, we should pay attention to the interaction between teachers and students, and emphasize that the classroom is student-centered."⁴ Only in this way can teachers find more good teaching methods.

5.3. Strengthening Theoretical Study and Establishing Scientific Evaluation System

It is also very important to study the theory of portfolio assessment. Teachers should strengthen the study of theoretical knowledge. To understand what formative assessment is, the requirements of the new curriculum standard on assessment, and how to introduce the portfolio assessment into students' English writing process, etc. For schools, they should carry out some theoretical training within their ability to strengthen the theoretical knowledge reserve of teachers. For example, the school can output a group of teachers to other excellent school learning experience, and carry out pilot promotion after returning to school. At the same time, the school can also invite some experts and teachers to the school for guidance. School leaders should also study relevant theories, summarize some cases for reference, and provide specific practical guidance for teachers.

6. Conclusion

From the data of the two questionnaires, it can be concluded that students' interest in writing, writing attitude and writing ability have been significantly improved. The portfolio is an effective measure for teachers to record students' learning process. Students' learning is a process of construction. At the same time, it is also a process of continuous development and renewal. The individual differences of students determine the diversity of teaching methods. Portfolio assessment of English writing is not only student-centered, but also focuses on students' learning process.

Firstly, portfolio assessment stimulates students' interest in learning and improves their classroom participation to a certain extent. Teachers need to use a variety of assessment methods to help students improve their English writing ability, so as to achieve the purpose of learning. It can be concluded from the implementation of this study that English writing portfolio assessment is a new teaching evaluation method worthy of implementation for senior high school English teachers. No matter it is the collection of students' writing materials or excellent works, these works can greatly improve students' self-confidence.

Secondly, students participate in the process of English writing evaluation by means of multiple assessment. In various activities, teachers' evaluation, students' mutual evaluation and students' self-evaluation have become the main ways of assessing compositions. Students can get more knowledge and information to improve their English writing ability by writing, revising, evaluating and reflecting their compositions.

To sum up, portfolio evaluation should be advocated in the current wave of evaluation reform in China.

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