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A Qualitative Research on Portfolio Keeping in English as a Foreign Language Writing

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Abstract

Little attention has been paid to the problems about portfolio keeping in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing, while the existing literature mostly focuses on the effects of portfolios on writing skills of learners, rather than those of teachers or pre-service teachers. This study aims to investigate the problems encountered and contributions of portfolios to the language skills of EFL pre-service teachers. The sample group consists of 39 pre-service teachers; a background questionnaire, interviews, a survey, and essays were used for data collection. The results indicate that portfolios significantly contribute to the writing skills, and that there exist potential problems. It was concluded that teachers and teacher trainers should use portfolio as a learning tool after solving the problems.

Keywords

English as a Foreign Language, Pre-Service Teachers, Writing Skills, and Portfolio

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A Qualitative Research on Portfolio Keeping in English as a Foreign Language Writing

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Little attention has been paid to the problems about portfolio keeping in English as a foreign language (EFL) writing, while the existing literature mostly focuses on the effects of portfolios on writing skills of learners, rather than those of teachers or pre-service teachers. This study aims to investigate the problems encountered and contributions of portfolios to the language skills of EFL pre-service teachers. The sample group consists of 39 pre-service teachers; a background questionnaire, interviews, a survey, and essays were used for data collection. The results indicate that portfolios significantly contribute to the writing skills, and that there exist potential problems. It was concluded that teachers and teacher trainers should use portfolio as a learning tool after solving the problems. Key Words: English as a Foreign Language, Pre-Service Teachers, Writing Skills, and Portfolio

Introduction

The present study was conducted under the guidance of three factors. First of all, as the related literature indicates, studies on portfolio keeping mainly focus on the EFL writing skills of learners but not of teachers or pre-service teachers. Secondly, little attention has been paid to the problems on portfolio keeping in EFL writing and the research activities mostly focused on the positive effects of portfolios. Thirdly, the studies conducted in Turkey are too limited to draw conclusions about the positive or negative effects of portfolio keeping on the writing skills of both learners and pre-service teachers. In other words, portfolio keeping might be a way to overcome poor writing instruction during teacher training process. Thus, it seems necessary to investigate the positive effects of portfolio keeping on EFL writing. With these concerns in mind, the paper focuses on two issues: the contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers, and the possible problems related to portfolio keeping in EFL writing.

Magnan (1985) asserts that the purposes of writing for foreign language learners include practicing grammatical forms and structures, vocabulary, and spelling, using information in context, and expressing their ideas, feelings, opinions, thoughts, and attitudes. Writing in a foreign language also has some pedagogical purposes such as reinforcement, training, imitation, communication, fluency, and learning (Raimes, 1987). Briefly, according to Scarcella and Oxford (1995), writing in a foreign language helps learners improve their grammatical, strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies in the target language. However, writing in English as a foreign language constitutes one of the problematic areas in language teaching and learning in Turkey due to some considerable reasons. Basically, it is difficult to argue that the competencies in question can be properly acquired by Turkish EFL learners since writing instruction is neglected during the language learning process at primary and secondary schools, except for those schools with intensive language programs.

Two reasons for the negligence in writing instruction are exam-oriented language classes and grammar- and reading-based textbooks. In addition to the teaching methods and materials, language teachers also play a key role in developing and improving the writing skills of EFL learners. However, there exist two potential problems with regard to the writing skills of Turkish EFL teachers: writing instruction that is neglected at primary and secondary education and limited writing instruction at higher education.

Secondary and higher education for language teacher training in Turkey consists of several steps. Having completed their first year in secondary education, students are guided to various programs such as Language, Science, Social Sciences and Mathematics. Secondly, language learners who have graduated from high school programs are selected and placed in various departments such as English Language Teaching, English Language and Literature, Linguistics, English and American Language and Culture, and Translation and Interpreting Studies in accordance with their preferences and their scores in the Foreign Language Examination, an official and central examination for selection and placement of students in the mentioned departments. The examination is a multiple choice test that consists of reading comprehension and grammar items. Dramatically and critically enough, it does not include any items that assess listening, speaking and writing skills. Therefore, to prepare for the examination, students studying in language programs at high schools usually ignore productive and communicative skills, only focusing on reading skills and grammar.

The second problem concerns writing instruction at higher education level. Writing classes are taught three hours a week during the first year in English Language Teaching programs. However, writing skills are presented integratively with reading skills in the program. In other words, the content of the course aims at the presentation of authentic and academic texts; development of reading sub-skills that require higher teaching skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; acquisition of academic and professional writing skills; and presentation of academic texts such as compositions, essays, and reports (Higher Education Council, 2008). In conclusion, it is obvious that the content of the course does not meet the basic pedagogical needs of pre-service teachers with regard to learning and teaching writing, and that the learning and teaching of writing is poor from pre- to post-stages of teacher education. Clearly enough, their levels of knowledge and learning / teaching processes in writing are two significant factors if pre-service teachers are to teach writing in English at primary and secondary schools throughout their professional lives.

Portfolios in English as Foreign Language Writing

Keeping portfolios, collections of information about a student teacher's abilities gained in different contexts over time (Kocoglu, 2008) was introduced in teacher education in the 1980s (Lyons, 1998 as cited in Kocoglu); and since then, there has been an increasing interest in using it as an educational tool (Loughran & Corrigan, 1995 as cited in Kocoglu). However, studies that focus on portfolio keeping in EFL writing among pre-service teachers seem limited for three reasons. Firstly, the research activities have mostly been on the effects of portfolio keeping on the writing skills of EFL learners, but not of teachers or pre-service teachers. Secondly, no certain data exist on the contributions and problems of portfolio keeping in EFL writing either for learners or for teachers in Turkey. Finally, while studies mainly focus on the

positive effects of portfolio keeping, little attention has been paid to the problems encountered during portfolio keeping process. Thus, this study focuses on the contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of Turkish EFL pre-service teachers and the problems that relate to portfolio keeping.

Effects of Portfolios on EFL Writing

The results of the previous studies chronologically presented below indicate that students usually show positive reactions to portfolio keeping. Furthermore, a review of the related literature reveals that portfolio keeping offers a means for student empowerment, helps learners analyze literary texts, write in a variety of styles, and demonstrate an awareness of the target language culture. Furthermore, it enriches the content, purpose, organization and the degree of intervention, improves and integrates proficiency skills, content knowledge, and grammatical competence, decreases writing anxiety, and fosters students' motivation to learn a foreign language. A qualitative case study conducted by Pollari (2000) aimed to try out and develop portfolios in foreign language teaching as a pedagogical innovation and to foster students' empowerment (i.e., their active and responsible role in learning). Findings obtained by the study suggest that a great majority of the students liked the portfolio approach and took charge of their learning. Thus, portfolios generally seemed to offer a means for student empowerment, though some students disliked the portfolio course and found the topic area as uninspiring and the student-centered and self-directed approach as inefficient, difficult, or unsuitable for them. In another study (Mathews & Hansen, 2004) examining the process in a foreign language department at a university went through in developing a procedure to assess its curriculum using the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines.

A portfolio of students' written works was collected as data. The results of the study indicated that students presented material that documented their abilities to analyze literary texts, write in a variety of styles, and demonstrate an awareness of the target language culture. In a study by Chang, Wu, and Ku (2005) which examined the effects of introducing electronic portfolios in teaching and assessing English as a Foreign Language in Taiwan, it was found that there was an overwhelmingly positive reaction among students except for some who felt intimidated by writing and speaking in English. Another study conducted by Orland-Barak (2005) investigated the specific quality of reflection associated with the use of portfolios, a "process" portfolio and a "product" portfolio, in teacher education. The results of the study indicated that the language of practice and the form of reflection bore striking similarities across the two practices of portfolio construction, regardless of their differences in content, purpose, organization and the degree of intervention of the course instructors in its construction. In an empirical study (Paesani, 2006) in which a writing portfolio project was presented, it was stated that portfolio keeping helps learners integrate the development of proficiency skills, content knowledge, and grammatical competence. In Ozturk and Cecen's (2007) investigation on the effects of portfolio keeping on the writing anxiety of EFL learners, the findings revealed that portfolio keeping is beneficial to overcome writing anxiety. The results also demonstrated that experience with portfolios might positively affect the participants' future teaching practices. Burksaitiene and Tereseviciene (2008) examined student perceptions of the experience of learning English for Law in the environment of a comprehensive learning and assessment system by integrating the project component and academic writing portfolio component into the framework of traditional learning. The results of

the research indicate that portfolio keeping is effective and useful in promoting students' productive and receptive language skills, enhances students' satisfaction with their results, fosters one's motivation to learn a foreign language, and promotes students' development as independent learners. Finally, the findings in Kocoglu's study (2008) that aimed to investigate the perceptions of EFL student teachers about electronic portfolios as a learning tool indicated that portfolio keeping supports their ongoing professional development while it does not seem as an important tool to develop reflective thinking.

In conclusion, the related literature has shown that portfolio keeping has positive effects on improving the language skills and knowledge of EFL learners. On the other hand, the considerable point is that the present study that investigates the effects of portfolios on writing skills of *pre-service teachers* while previous ones mainly focus on writing skills of *learners*. In addition, while the studies cited above examines the *positives effects* of portfolio keeping, this paper focuses on the *problems* that encountered during the process. To end, the present study seems to contribute significantly to the relevant literature on the effects of portfolio keeping on writing skills of *pre-service teachers* and the *problems* encountered during portfolio keeping process.

The author of the present paper completed his Ph.D. dissertation on the efficiency of computers on testing writing skills. Then, he has been interested in interdisciplinary research on relationship between technology, foreign language testing, and writing skills. He also teaches courses of writing skills, testing in EFL and technology related language learning for pre-service teachers of English. The topic of the present study seemed significant to the author as his students keep portfolio in their writing classes. That is, the outcomes of the research are directly related to the effects of portfolio in foreign language writing, and will lead new research topics such as e-portfolios, teacher effect on portfolios, and scale development for assessing portfolios. In sum, the author intends to research portfolio effects on EFL writing in his and his students' educational settings, to develop a scale that aims to develop a scale measuring quantitatively the contributions of portfolios and the problems encountered during the process, and to narrow the topic such as teacher effect, students' motivation, and their attitudes in terms of portfolio keeping.

Method

Prior to contacting the participants, the research proposal was presented to the head of ELT department at Necatibey Education Faculty of Balikesir University. The proposal included an outline that demonstrates the significance, purposes, and methodology, and research tools of the study. Then, International Review Board (IRB) approval was sought through Necatibey Education Faculty of Balikesir University, Turkey. After the IRB approval was granted, the author attempted to locate the participants who received Advanced Reading and Writing Class. Since the present research involved a survey, interviews and examinations, a claim for exemptions was also presented. Then, after the research ethics and the purposes of the study were explained to the students, the study was conducted. Finally, it seems necessary to note that IRB, also called an Independent Ethics Committee (IEC) or Ethical Review Board (ERB), is a board that is designated to approve, monitor and review behavioral research involving humans with the purpose of protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects participated in the research.

The sample group of the study consisted of 39 pre-service teachers studying in the English Language Teaching Department (ELT) of the Faculty of Education at Balikesir University. The group contained all the freshmen in the department since writing class is taught during the first year of the program. Twenty-three (58%) of the participants were female and 16 (41%) were male. The mean age of the participants was 19.4. All the participants were Turkish pre-service teachers with an advanced level of English. They all previously studied English during their high school education and attended the ELT department. Twenty-one (53.8%) of the subjects graduated from Anatolian high schools that aim at teacher training while, 18 (46.2%) graduated from super high schools. Finally, as an indicator of their language proficiency and achievement, their scores in the Foreign Language Examination were examined and the mean score was calculated to be 346.4. The participants were informed before, after and during the research process on the purposes and outputs of the study. Speaking specifically, considering the participants were pre-service teachers of English, the importance of writing skills in language learning and teaching, the contributions of the study to the related field and to teaching and learning processes in practice were discussed in pair, group and classroom sessions. To end, the participants stated that they participated voluntarily in the research.

The data collection instruments consisted of a background questionnaire, interviews, a survey, and essays. The background questionnaire interrogated the participants about their genders, ages, high schools. In the interviews, the author asked the pre-service teachers about their opinions on the contributions and problems of portfolio keeping in writing in English. The questions were also asked in the survey and given the participants as a topic to construct an essay on the contributions of portfolio keeping and the problems they encountered. Conclusively, though the background questionnaire aimed to interrogate some subject variables, the research was not conducted descriptively but qualitatively as interviews, the survey questions and essays were used to provide data from the perspectives of the subjects. In other words, in the present study, participants' personal opinions which derived from interviews, surveys and essays they produced were used to elicit data qualitatively as it did not seem possible to reach conclusions holistically and heuristically in a descriptive or experimental study in natural settings.

The study used a three-step procedure: instruction, data collection and data analysis.

Step 1: Instruction

Writing class was taught during 24 weeks in two semesters of the academic year 2007 – 2008. The content of the course consisted of three main periods: sentence and paragraph structures, paragraph development methods and techniques, the basics of essay writing. In the first period, the structures of simple, complex and compound sentences, capitalization and punctuation, unity, coherence and conjunctives, parts of a paragraph, and paragraph outline were introduced to the participants. The second period included the paragraph development methods and techniques such as listing of specific details, classification, using examples, definition, cause and effect, comparison and contrast, and problem solution. In the last period, the parts of composition and the methods such as exposition, narration, argumentation and description were taught. The pre-service teachers are asked to keep portfolios during the second and third periods. Portfolio keeping process consisted of three steps. In the first step, pre-service teachers created the first draft of their products including

brainstorming, clustering and outlining. Then, the participants gave and received peer feedbacks on the basis of a 15-question scale to evaluate the written pieces. After necessary revisions and corrections depending on the revision plans, the pre-service teachers created their second drafts. Having received the oral feedback of their instructor, they wrote their final drafts. Finally, the portfolios were completed with cover letters, tables of contents, entries, dates, drafts, reflections, and revision plans. In conclusion, they were instructed in natural settings in which their behaviors would occur naturally and the researcher would not affect their behaviors.

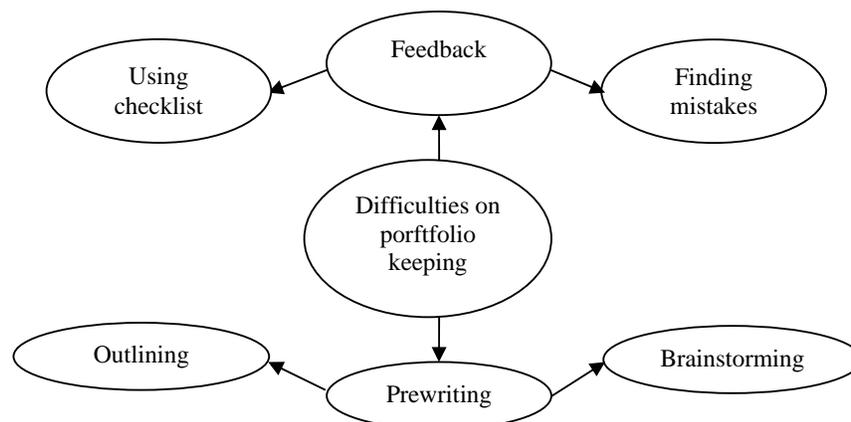
Step 2: Data Collection

In order to provide triangulation, and to ensure the validity of the obtained data, three instruments were administered: a survey, interviews and their responses to examination questions. First of all, the participants were asked to response about the contributions of portfolio keeping and problems encountered during the process. That is, they noted their responses in their cover letter that included two survey questions and the background questionnaire before submitting their portfolios. Next, after two weeks, the author interviewed with the participants on the contributions of portfolio keeping and problems individually, in small groups, and in classroom environment. Finally, at the end of the semester, the instructor administered the final examination question in which a topic about the contributions of portfolio keeping and problems encountered during the process existed.

Step 3: Data Analysis

The data obtained from each source were analyzed separately. That is, the data obtained from each of the sources were transferred into three s in which the statements were listed and numbered, as seen in the example given below (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Concept Maps*



After comparing the statements and numbers, it was observed that the data from each one seemed similar. The triangulation indicated that the data ensured the validity. Finally, the data from three maps were combined and presented in numbers and frequencies in percent in two tables given in the following section.

In brief, the qualitative investigation included three steps. Firstly, the research problem was defined as the contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers, and the problems encountered during portfolio keeping. Secondly, in order to gather data, a variety of means, interviews, survey questions and examination papers were utilized. Thirdly, in order to validate the findings and to see whether the data were valid, the data from three different sources were compared through concept maps.

The findings in the study were divided into two sub-sections: the contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers, and the problems encountered during portfolio keeping. To put it another way, the numbers and frequencies in percent were provided in accordance with the responses of the participants.

Results

The first issue concerned the contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers. Hence, the findings about the contributions of portfolio keeping to writing skills are given in Table 1. The values in the table indicate that portfolio keeping has beneficial effects on the improvement of vocabulary, grammar, reading and research skills, organization of paragraphs and compositions, punctuation and capitalization, giving and receiving feedback, paragraph and composition development methods and techniques, and qualifications of paragraphs and compositions. First and foremost, according to the pre-service teachers, portfolio keeping in writing classes helps improve their vocabulary knowledge. That is, pre-service teachers can use words in context, their dictionaries to find the appropriate words and a rich variety of words in the texts they produced as one of the participants stated below:

Researcher: Do you believe that portfolio keeping improved your vocabulary?

Participant A: Certainly. I needed to research and read much in order to write well. Thus, when I read, I encountered new words, checked them using dictionary, and tried to select the appropriate ones in my papers. Also, I am aware of the synonyms and antonyms of the words.

Secondly, the participants believe that keeping portfolio in writing helps improve their knowledge of grammar, which means that they can produce more fluent sentences in their paragraphs and essays. Moreover, it helps pre-service teachers produce more complex and compound sentences and use linking or signal words when they combine sentences in their written products as seen in the following dialogue:

Researcher: How does portfolio keeping contribute to your grammar knowledge?

Participant B: With the feedback of my peer and teacher, I learned to use conjunctions, for instance. Tenses were also not grammatical issues but the subjects that should be used in the context. That is, I learned that grammar is necessary to create meaningful sentences.

Thirdly, the pre-service teachers think that portfolio keeping is a way to improve their reading skills as they feel the need to gain information through reading to be informed on the topics they are writing about. Moreover, the need for information about various topics is beneficial to improve their research skills as a pre-service teacher says:

I improved my reading skills when I write because I had to find and read some texts in English to have information on the topic. When I summarized the text, I began to see the main ideas and details in the passages.

As another contribution of portfolio keeping, the subjects think that they learned to organize the paragraphs and compositions during the process of portfolio keeping. To put it another way, they learned pre-writing activities such as brainstorming, clustering and outlining, as stated below. Furthermore, the information and practice on punctuation and capitalization are acquired during the process, as seen below.

When I was at high school, I rarely wrote compositions. It was difficult to start writing. The most difficult part was to write the first sentence. Now, I know that it is possible to write without clustering, planning and outlining. When everything is ready, it is easier to write.

Another contribution of portfolio keeping in writing instruction is that pre-service teachers learned how to give feedbacks to their partners. In other words, in this process, the participants learned to use a checklist for the examination of papers, to find and classify the errors in papers they checked. On the other hand, the pre-service teachers think that teacher and peer feedbacks contribute to error correction and revision of their papers, as said below. As a fifth contribution, the participants believe that portfolio keeping is useful to acquire information about the paragraph and essay development methods and techniques, as one of them underlines:

At the beginning, I didn't believe that my peer would help me because we were in the same class. I mean we were in the same level. After a while, my peer found so simple mistakes in my papers that I couldn't believe myself how I did those. Then, I saw that one cannot see and correct her own mistakes.

The sixth and final contribution for the subjects in the study was that portfolio keeping is an effective way to learn the characteristics of a paragraph and essay. In this sense, they believe that it is beneficial to produce coherent paragraphs and essays in unity, to write creatively and originally, to use the language in context without translating from their native language to the target language, and to reflect their ideas, feelings and thoughts in their products, as one of participants emphasized:

Researcher: Does writing in accordance with some rules prevent your creativity?

Participant C: Yes, if the topic is boring. It sometimes prevents. But it is not possible to write without having information about the methods and techniques. By the time, I noticed that my peer created her own

style. Actually, I can understand who wrote how without seeing my friends' names.

Table 1. *The contributions of portfolio keeping to the writing skills of EFL pre-service teachers*

| Statements | N | F (%) |
|---|-----|-------|
| I improved my vocabulary knowledge. | 13 | 5.0 |
| I learned to use words in context. | 6 | 2.3 |
| I learned how to use a dictionary to find appropriate words. | 4 | 1.5 |
| I learned to use a variety of words. | 7 | 2.7 |
| I improved my grammar knowledge. | 12 | 4.6 |
| I learned to produce complex and compound sentences. | 3 | 1.2 |
| I learned to use linking and signal words when I combine sentences. | 6 | 2.3 |
| I learned to write more fluent sentences. | 2 | 0.8 |
| I improved my reading skills. | 6 | 2.3 |
| I gained information about the topics I wrote about. | 2 | 0.8 |
| I improved my research skills. | | |
| I learned how to organize a paragraph and composition. | 25 | 9.6 |
| I learned brainstorming and clustering before starting to write. | 20 | 7.7 |
| I learned to prepare an outline before starting to write. | 18 | 6.9 |
| I learned how to use punctuation and capitalization. | 5 | 1.9 |
| I learned how to give feedback. | 9 | 3.5 |
| I learned to find the mistakes in a paper. | 11 | 4.2 |
| I learned to classify the mistakes in a paper. | 8 | 3.1 |
| I learned to use a checklist when I examine a paper. | 10 | 3.8 |
| Peer and teacher feedback helped me | 17 | 6.5 |
| To notice and correct my mistakes. | 11 | 4.2 |
| To revise my papers. | 8 | 3.1 |
| I had information about paragraph and essay development methods and techniques. | 12 | 4.6 |
| I learned the parts of a paragraph and essay. | 8 | 3.1 |
| I learned the characteristics of a paragraph and essay. | 13 | 5.0 |
| I learned to produce coherent paragraphs and essay. | 7 | 2.7 |
| I learned how to write a paragraph and essay in unity. | 9 | 3.5 |
| I learned how to produce original papers. | 2 | 0.8 |
| I began to write creatively. | 1 | 0.4 |
| I began to write in English without translating from Turkish. | 2 | 0.8 |
| I learned to reflect my ideas, feelings and thoughts in my papers. | 3 | 1.2 |
| Total | 260 | 100 |

The second issue concerned the problems encountered during portfolio keeping in writing in English. Thus, the data on the problems related to portfolio keeping in writing classes are presented in Table 2. The first problem is that, as the participants of the study suggest, portfolio keeping is boring and tiring as they need to study each week to complete their products and it takes a long time to finish them. For example, a participant says:

I think it is really boring especially when the topic is boring. How can I organize and develop my ideas on a subject if I have no information on it. If the topic is not interesting for me, it is not a subject matter to write on but just homework to submit on time.

Secondly, the pre-service teachers need to write using certain paragraph and essay methods and techniques, which they believe to prevent creative writing. For example, one states:

I used to write some stories and poems when I was at high school. But now I am really confused because we only focus on certain techniques. I am not sure how I can write poems using *comparison and contrast*.

The third problem for the subjects is that the most difficult parts of portfolio keeping concern feedback exchange, pre-writing activities, production of the second and third drafts, using appropriate vocabulary and signal words, and studying with partners. The pre-service teachers had some difficulties in using a checklist that requires responding to several questions, as well as in finding all the mistakes in papers. Moreover, they think that brainstorming, clustering and outlining are difficult for them. For instance, one of the pre-service teachers says:

If I had not used a checklist to give feedback to my partner, I would have criticized his paper in a broader perspective. I would be more creative and useful.

The last difficulty for them was studying with a partner as they had the fear of negative evaluation, as stated by one of the participants.

I noticed that I felt worried when I discuss on my sentences with my partner. The same thing happened to me when the teacher examines my paper.

In conclusion, the results indicate that portfolio keeping in EFL writing has some significant contributions to the writing skills of foreign language pre-service teachers although there are some potential problems as well. Briefly, portfolio keeping in EFL writing has positive and beneficial effects on vocabulary and grammar learning and practice, reading and research skills, organization of paragraphs and compositions, punctuation and capitalization, giving and receiving feedback, paragraph and essay development methods and techniques, and characteristics of paragraphs and essays. However, according to the data presented, portfolio keeping is boring and tiring as they need to study every week to complete their products and it also takes too much time to finish them. What is more, the pre-service teachers need

to write using certain paragraph and essay methods and techniques, which they believe to prevent creative writing.

Table 2. *The problems encountered during portfolio keeping*

| Statements | N | F (%) |
|---|----|-------|
| It is boring to write every week. | 6 | 11.1 |
| Portfolio keeping takes too much time. | 9 | 16.7 |
| Portfolio keeping is tiring. | 3 | 5.6 |
| Portfolio keeping prevents creative writing. | 4 | 7.4 |
| The most difficult part of portfolio keeping is | | |
| To give feedback. | 7 | 13.0 |
| To find all the mistakes in a paper. | 3 | 5.6 |
| To check the paper using a checklist. | 3 | 5.6 |
| Pre-writing activities. | 5 | 9.3 |
| To brainstorm and cluster. | 4 | 7.4 |
| To prepare an outline. | 3 | 5.6 |
| To write the second and third drafts. | 2 | 3.7 |
| To find the appropriate words. | 1 | 1.9 |
| To combine the sentences. | 1 | 1.9 |
| To study with a partner. | 2 | 3.7 |
| Because I don't like negative comments. | 1 | 1.9 |
| Total | 54 | 100 |

Conclusions and Discussion

The present study aims to investigate the contributions of portfolio keeping to the language skills of EFL pre-service teachers and the problems encountered during the process since related literature has mostly focused on the effects of portfolio keeping on the EFL writing skills of learners, but not of teachers or pre-service teachers, and little attention has been paid to the problems about portfolio keeping in EFL writing while research activities mostly focused on the positive effects of portfolios. In addition, the studies conducted in Turkey are too limited to draw conclusions about the positive or negative effects of portfolio keeping on the writing skills of both learners and pre-service teachers. The sample group of the study consisted of 39 EFL pre-service teachers. As data collection instruments, a background questionnaire, interviews, a survey and composition texts were used to examine the contributions of portfolio keeping in EFL writing and the problems encountered during portfolio keeping process. The collected data were used to provide a qualitative analysis to address the research issues.

Two main results were obtained from the study: the first is that portfolio keeping in writing in EFL has some significant contributions to the writing skills of foreign language pre-service teachers, and the second result is that there exist some potential problems on portfolio keeping in EFL writing. Mainly, portfolio keeping has some beneficial effects on vocabulary, grammar, reading and research skills, organization of paragraphs and essays, punctuation and capitalization, giving and receiving feedback, paragraph and essay development methods and techniques, and

the characteristics of paragraphs and essays. That is to say, portfolio keeping in EFL writing helps pre-service teachers improve their vocabulary knowledge, use a variety of vocabulary in context and use dictionaries appropriately. It also helps practicing grammar knowledge; specifically speaking, producing more fluent sentences and using linking or signal words when combining sentences. Next, portfolio keeping is one of the most effective ways to improve reading and research skills of EFL pre-service teachers. To add, portfolio keeping in writing skills has positive effects on the quality and organization of paragraphs and essays, the use of punctuation and capitalization, giving and receiving feedback, and using paragraph and essay development methods and techniques. On the other hand, portfolio keeping in EFL writing poses some potential problems. Firstly, portfolio keeping is a boring and tiring process as it requires much time to prepare the first, second and third drafts for paragraphs and essays and to give and receive feedback that includes the examination of papers in accordance with a checklist and preparation of revision lists. Secondly, portfolio keeping prevents creative writing as pre-service teachers should write within the limits of certain paragraph and essay methods and techniques. Finally, fear of negative evaluation is one of the problems experienced by pre-service teachers when they have to study with partners.

The discussion of the study results in relation to the findings of the previous research can be summarized under two headings. First, the results of the present study indicate that portfolio keeping has some significant contributions to the writing skills of foreign language pre-service teachers as Pollari (2000) reported that a great majority of the students took charge of their learning, and Chang, Wu, and Ku (2005) found that there existed an overwhelmingly positive reaction among the students. The findings of the present study reveal that portfolio keeping in EFL writing has positive and beneficial effects on the organization of paragraphs and essays, punctuation and capitalization, giving and receiving feedback, paragraph and essay development methods and techniques, and the characteristics of paragraphs and essays as Mathews and Hansen (2004) noted that it helped students analyze literary texts, write in a variety of styles, and demonstrate an awareness of the target language culture, and as Orland-Barak (2005) reported that it has positive effects on content, purpose and organization. The study also found out that portfolio keeping improves reading and research skills as Burksaitiene and Tereseviciene (2008) showed that portfolio keeping is effective and useful in promoting students' productive and receptive language skills. In other words, the results of the study suggest that, as Paesani (2006) demonstrated that portfolio keeping helps learners integrate the development of proficiency skills, content knowledge, and grammatical competence, it improves vocabulary and grammar learning and practice. Secondly, in addition to the findings noted by Pollari that some students disliked the portfolio course, and found the topic area uninspiring and the student-centered and self-directed approach inefficient, difficult, or unsuitable for them, the results of the present study demonstrate that portfolio keeping is boring and tiring as the students need to study every week to complete their products, it takes too much time to finish their essays, and prevents creative writing. On the other hand, it also found that some of the participants suffer from the fear of negative evaluation, one of the anxiety types encountered in foreign language learning, while the findings in Ozturk and Cecen's (2007) research showed that portfolio keeping is beneficial to overcome writing anxiety. In conclusion, though similar results have been found, the study differs from the others as it focuses on the effects of portfolio keeping on the EFL writing of pre-service teachers, instead of EFL learners.

Given that portfolio keeping has both positive and negative effects on the EFL writing of pre-service teachers, some suggestions for practical purposes can be made. As a foreign language learning tool, portfolios can be used by both teachers and teacher trainers for the following purposes: to improve vocabulary and grammar in context, to integrate writing skills into reading and research skills, to organize and develop the paragraphs and essays within the limits of certain methods and techniques, and to teach revision and correction strategies. However, teachers and teacher trainers should be aware of their students' individual differences such as their levels of motivation, attitudes and affective states. In other words, as some pre-service teachers think that portfolio keeping is a boring and tiring activity, teachers and teacher trainers should bear the responsibility and show flexibility with regard to the factors that affect the process negatively. That is, they need to motivate their students for a continuous and regular writing, be aware of the factors that may cause negative attitudes towards writing, and know how to cope with anxiety provoking factors. Since pre-service teachers complain that portfolio keeping as limited by certain paragraph and essay methods and techniques prevents creative writing, teachers and teacher trainers can assign their students to keep diaries or write journals regardless of any writing methods or techniques taught in class. Samples of those creative products might also be shared in the classroom environment as a motivating activity. Some pre-service teachers believe that certain stages of the portfolio keeping process pose some difficulties. Among them are feedback, pre-writing activities, construction of the second and third drafts, using appropriate vocabulary and signal words, and studying with partners. Teachers and teacher trainers should focus on those problematic areas and use some strategies to suggest solutions to the problems. In other words, they need to determine and analyze the problematic areas, and finally, to use appropriate strategies to solve them. For instance, teachers and teacher trainers might investigate the problems, create a discussion environment about the problems with learners, and suggest a group work. Finally, as portfolio keeping provokes the fear of negative evaluation among some pre-service teachers, teachers and teacher trainers should assign partners with similar levels of proficiency. As a result, teachers and teacher trainers should use portfolio as a tool of language learning as Nunan notes (1988) that it promotes learning communication and developing a critical awareness of language learning.

As a final note on the limitations of the research, the subjects of the study were limited to 39 pre-service teachers studying in the English Language Teaching Department (ELT) of the Faculty of Education at Balikesir University. Furthermore, the scope of the study was confined to the data collected qualitatively using interviews, survey questions and essays. Given that the study holistically investigates the contributions of portfolio keeping in EFL writing and the problems encountered during the process, further studies should deductively focus on the relationships between portfolio keeping in EFL writing and the variables that might affect the process positively or negatively.

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