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**IMPLEMENTATION OF WRITING PORTFOLIOS AT A PREPARATORY  
SCHOOL IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT**

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## **ÖZET**

### **BİR ÜNİVERSİTE HAZIRLIK OKULUNDA YAZIM PORTFÖYÜ UYGULAMASI**

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Bu çalışma bir üniversite hazırlık okulunda yazma portföyünün kullanılmasını araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. 8 hafta süren bu çalışmaya Zirve Üniversitesi İngilizce Hazırlık Okulu'nun 17 öğrencisi katılmıştır. Veriler araştırmacının çalışma boyunca tuttuğu günlüğü ve öğrencilerin yazdıkları kapak mektupları aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Verilerin analizi sonucunda, yazma portföylerinin uygulanabilirliği ve öğrencilerin zayıf ve güçlü yönlerini farketmesinde yazma portföylerinin yardımcı bir rol üstlendiği ortaya çıkmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yazım Portföyü, Öz-Değerlendirme

## **ABSTRACT**

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF WRITING PORTFOLIOS AT A PREPARATORY SCHOOL IN A UNIVERSITY CONTEXT**

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**Supervisor: Assist. Prof. Dr. Hülya YUMRU**

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This study aims to investigate the implementation of writing portfolios at a preparatory school and the effects of portfolios on students in becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses. 17 students of Zirve University English Preparatory School participated in this study for eight weeks. Data collection tools were the researcher's diary and cover letters of students. The results of the data analysis indicated that the use of portfolios could be implemented and portfolios helped students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing.

**Key Words:** Writing Portfolios, Self-Assessment

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

**L1** : First Language

**L2** : Second Language

**EFL** : English as a Foreign Language

**ESL** : English as a Second Language

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>COVER .....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>APPROVAL PAGE .....</b>	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>III</b>
<b>ÖZET .....</b>	<b>IV</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>V</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS. ....</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>VII</b>

### CHAPTER 1

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Background of the Study .....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem .....	2
1.3. Purpose of the Study .....	3
1.4. Significance of the Study .....	3
1.5. Research Questions .....	4
1.6. Operational Definitions .....	4
1.7. Limitations of the Study .....	4

### CHAPTER 2

<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.1. Writing in a Second Language .....	5
2.2. The Process Approach to Writing Instruction .....	7
2.3. Assessment of Writing .....	8
2.4. Portfolios .....	9
2.4.1. Content of Portfolios .....	10
2.4.2. Types of Portfolios .....	11
2.4.3. Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Tool .....	13
2.4.4. Portfolio as a Self-Assessment Tool .....	14
2.4.5. Benefits of Using Portfolio .....	15
2.4.6. Challenges of Using Portfolios .....	15

### CHAPTER 3

<b>3. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. Research Design .....	17
3.2. Research Questions .....	17
3.3. Participants of the Study .....	17
3.4. Data Collection Instruments .....	18
3.5. Procedures .....	18
3.6. An Eight Week Writing Portfolio Instruction .....	19
3.6.1. Week 1 .....	20
3.6.2. Week 2 .....	21
3.6.3. Week 3 .....	21
3.6.4. Week 4 .....	22
3.6.5. Week 5 .....	22
3.6.6. Week 6 .....	23
3.6.7. Week 7 .....	23
3.6.8. Week 8 .....	24
3.7. Data Analysis .....	24

### CHAPTER 4

<b>4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1. The Cycles of the Process Approach .....	25
4.1.1. Pre-Writing .....	25
4.1.2. Drafting .....	28
4.1.3. Revising and Editing .....	29
4.2. Keeping Portfolios from Students' Perspective .....	32
4.3. Keeping Portfolios from Teachers' Perspective .....	33
4.4. The Role of Portfolios for Preparatory School Students in Becoming Aware of Their Strengths and Weaknesses .....	34



## CHAPTER 5

<b>5. CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>38</b>
5.1. Summary of the Study .....	38
5.2. Implications and Suggestions for Further Studies .....	40
<b>6. REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>42</b>

## CHAPTER 1

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background to the study

Portfolio-based assessment resulted in a change of focus in teaching writing. Process approach changed the focus from product to the processes of writing and learner strategies. This reform brought greater varieties in writing classes and the need to assess the effectiveness of writing process, which led to assessing performance, in particular portfolios. Today, it is not enough to set a measured objective as a mark to be achieved. How the course instruction is meeting its objectives is one of the concerns in assessment. It is needed to gather more detailed information about students' strengths and needs, teachers' performances and institutions' writing curriculum (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). Thus, portfolio assessment emerged as a performance assessment tool. As Nunes (2004) states, a more learner-centered practice can be adopted by using portfolios in EFL classrooms since the teacher can not only diagnose the learners' skill and competences, but also be aware of their preferences, styles, dispositions, and learning strategies.

The term *portfolio* became current for native speakers of English. Since Belanoff and Elbow (1991) implemented portfolio-based writing assessment at the State University of New York-Stony Brook, portfolios have spread. However, nowadays portfolios are perceived as convenient for ESL and EFL learners because "portfolios provide a broader measure of what students can do, and because they replace timed writing context, which has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against non-native writers" (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p.61). Students will gain more effective writing behaviors when teachers, who act as coaches in a workshop environment, encourage students and correct drafts on spot. Coaches, intervening regularly in the learning process, immediately correct the things student do wrong and praise them when they do something right. Revising drafts on the basis of feedback provided by the teacher and fellow students forms most of the class time (Williams, J. D., 2003).

Portfolios have attracted a considerable amount of attention because they provide a opportunity for self-assessment to the learner. During self-assessment, learners identify their strengths, weaknesses and learning strategies, which plays an important role in becoming

autonomous learners. By monitoring their progress, learners can show effort in learning according to the individual needs (Hileman & Case, 1991).

Although the literature primarily focuses on portfolio assessment and writing theory on the context of individual class, portfolios are increasingly being implemented in broader contexts- university curricula (Elbow & Belanoff, 1991; Holt & Baker, 1991; Wauters, 1991, Rosenberg, 1991, Smit, Kolonosky, & Seltzer, 1991). Therefore, portfolios provide the opportunity to reflect on writing instruction and curriculum in institutions. The fact that, “a credible portfolio assessment must incorporate the learning context within which it was produced” makes portfolios a classroom instruction and teacher development tools (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000, p. 3). The way it reveals and informs teaching and learning is what makes the portfolio assessment different from another test.

In a formal education setting where it is required to meet a test score to pass, students do not usually have the opportunity to evaluate their performance. Portfolio implementation in writing classes may help students become aware of their progress over time and find learning strategies and writing processes working best for them. Moreover, writing portfolio might provide reflections on writing instruction in the classroom (Hamp-Lyon & Condon, 2000).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Since the portfolio originally emerged in L1 writing, there are not a lot of studies dealing with writing portfolios in EFL. Available research is mainly on writing in second language and writing portfolios implemented for native speakers of English (Smit, Kolonosky, & Seltzer, 1991; Larson 1991; Scott, 1991; Hileman & Case, 1991). As a result, there is not much written about students’ self-reflection through portfolios or on teacher perceptions and reflections of portfolio implementation in the EFL setting. This study may be useful by focusing on the role of portfolios in EFL writing classes in terms of reflection.

Writing is the skill to which most importance is given at Zirve University Preparatory School of English. The students are expected to accomplish a variety of assignments given through the four terms. Since there is a limited time to cover the subject and allow students to complete the assignment of the week, students usually write only one draft; they do not necessarily revise it nor do they keep their products in a file. Consequently, students cannot perceive writing as a process, monitor their progress and derive benefit from a file, which tells a lot about their writing skills.

Another issue is that most students of Preparatory School cannot manage to be autonomous learners and take responsibility for their learning. They are not aware of their

weakness and strengths in writing. Therefore, they cannot find the best strategies for themselves in becoming better writers. By keeping portfolios, students may monitor their progress through the term, and this can foster learning the language and acquiring universal writing skills. This pilot study may be used to create a writing culture at Preparatory School of Zirve University.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to implement a portfolio system at Zirve University Preparatory School. In this study, portfolio will be used as a self-assessment tool rather than an alternative assessment tool. At Zirve University Preparatory School, students do not regard language learning, in particular learning to write, as a process, because they have not experienced the writing processes in their formal education. This study aims to help students see their progress at the end of the term and self-reflect on their writing skills.

The portfolio design used in this study will be a collection of drafts students produce throughout the term. Students will evaluate their drafts from time to time to monitor their progress. At the end of the term, they will make an overall evaluation of their performance. The portfolios will also give implications about the writing instruction in the classroom.

### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

Writing in a foreign language is a complex process not only for students but also for educators in terms of assessment and evaluation (Brown, 2004; Williams, 2003). Students are expected to demonstrate a range of knowledge and skills. From the point of teachers, writing is a skill that demands a lot of time and effort to teach and evaluate. In literature, there is little research on implementing a portfolio system in a preparatory school context (Caner, 2010; Ügüten 2009; Erice, 2008; Türkkorur, 2005; Bayram, 2006). This study may contribute to the literature by demonstrating the effects of using portfolios on students in seeing their progress and self-reflecting on their writing skills.

The writing portfolios in this study will provide students with feedback and opportunity to go back and revise. This collection process may enable them to see their progress, identify the best strategies for their learning and increase their motivation and confidence to write more and better. Furthermore, students may be aware of the importance of the writing process.

This study will be the first implementation of the portfolio in the Preparatory School at Zirve University. It aims to provide support for the idea that keeping portfolios allow students

monitor their progress and self-reflection. This pilot study might result in using process-writing portfolios in all of the preparatory school and portfolios could start to be used as an alternative assessment tool. The possible problems could be foreseen before the main application by the results of this study. Students' cover letters might provide valuable feedback for teachers and institution to reflect on the present writing instruction.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

The research questions of this study is as follows:

1. How can I implement the use of portfolio in writing classes at Preparatory School in the university context?
2. Does involvement in portfolios help Preparatory School students become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing?

### **1.6. Limitations of the Study**

The main purpose of the present study is to find out how the use of portfolios can be implemented at a preparatory school. Learning to use Portfolio as a learning tool requires a process. However, we have only 8 weeks to conduct the study with a total of 17 students. For this reason, the number of the participants and the duration of the study might be the limitations of this study.

### **1.7. Operational Definitions**

The following terms are frequently used in this thesis:

**Portfolio:** A portfolio is a collection of what students produce in order to demonstrate their efforts and progress with their reflections.

**Self-assessment:** Self-assessment is a formative type of assessment in which students closely monitor their improvement and can evaluate their language ability or language performance (Brown & Hudson, 1998)

## CHAPTER 2

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Writing in a Second Language

Writing in a native language differs from writing in a second or foreign language because writing is not only a communication tool but also a learning tool in these contexts (Raimes, 1983; Leki, 1992; Harmer, 2007). In English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, writing classes give learners chance to practice English grammar and vocabulary while they are trying to communicate their ideas. This makes writing in L2 more complicated and requires many abilities and strategies. From the most basic motor skills to the most complex cognitive strategies, writing in L1 requires harmonization of a great number of skills and strategies, which means writing in L2 clearly increases the writer's cognitive load (Leki, 1992; Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001; Cumming, 1989, 1990; Silva, 1992, Xiaoxiao & Yan, 2010). Students writing in a second language are presented with additional difficulties when writing. They must gain proficiency in the language they are learning while also trying to master basic writing skills and strategies (Myles, 2002).

A simplistic view of writing would assume that writing is simply the graphic representation of spoken language (Brown, 2001). A half-century ago, second language teaching experts were saying that writing was basically a convention for recording speech and for reinforcing grammatical and lexical features of language (Brown, 2004). Fortunately, no one holds this view today. Writing is understood as an inimitable skill with its own features and conventions (Brown, 2001; Williams, 2003). It is undeniable that learning to write well in any language is difficult. The ability to express ideas clearly with logical, well-developed organization for an intended purpose in ones native language is not naturally developed. Thus, learning to write coherent essays with rhetorical and discourse devices in a second language is a more complicated process (Schoonen et. al.,2003; Wolf, 2000, cited in Topuz, 2004). Xiaoxiao and Yan (2010) agree that EFL writing is a complex social activity. Many comprehensive abilities like choosing suitable topics according to certain audience, generating logical and clear ideas, structuring rich and proper content, demonstrating accurate language expressions, etc. and thinking skills such as classifying, evaluating, synthesizing, etc. can be gained with process approach writing, which can provide a holistic and dynamic writing experience and emphasizes dialogues between teachers and students or between peers

(Xiaoxiao & Yan 2010). Grabe and Kaplan (1996) also stress that “writing is first and foremost a communicative activity” (p. 266).

Cumming (2001) mentions that learning to write in a second language has three dimensions that are features of the texts, the composing processes and the sociocultural contexts, and each dimension has a micro and macro perspective. This brings a local or a more global view to second language writing (Cumming, 2001).

Writing serves for two purposes in EFL classrooms: writing for learning and writing for writing (Harmer, 2007). It means that writing cannot be learnt without writing and without practice. No matter what the level, EFL and ESL learners should write in the classroom every day, varying from simple tasks to more complex writing purposes (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Raimes (1983) advocates the help of writing to learn the language and maintains that writing strengthens the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary taught in the classroom. It also makes students take risks by going beyond what they have just learned, and they become very involved with the language while they are trying to express their ideas. While learners try to find the best way to put their ideas on paper, they usually discover something new. This relationship between thinking and writing makes writing an indispensable part of learning a second language (Brown, 2001). Beretier and Scardamalia (1987, cited in Myles, 2002) claim that second language writers are subject to the difficulty of simultaneously writing and gaining information.

Researchers have determined three basic steps to the act of writing: the social and cultural context of the writer, the text they are working with, and the cognitive process involved in writing (Cumming, 1989). The latter of the three comprises the process approach to writing, while the first two refer to theoretical orientations of writing as socializing and as a product. The process approach itself has been divided into two respective understandings. For the expressivists, writing was seen as the process that encourage student to write freely on those topics that matter to him/her. The second one is the cognitive understanding which gives importance to the mental machinations involves in conveying ideas on paper. (Larios, Murphy, & Marin, 2002).

## **2.2. The Process Approach to Writing Instruction**

Writing is generally considered a complicated skill in English Language Teaching because it is a tool used both for communication and learning. Raimes (1983) defines writing as not just single sentences but a connected text written for a purpose and a reader that makes the process of writing a valuable learning tool. Hence, the nature of the composing process of writing has become a major theme in pedagogical research on writing.

According to Brown (2001), the face of writing classes has changed by the recognition of the compositional nature of writing. A half century ago, the main concern of writing teachers was the final product of writing. Compositions were supposed to meet certain standards of prescribed English and a great deal of attention was paid to how well a student's product matched against a list of criteria (Brown, 2001; Hamp-Lyon & Condon, 2000). The process approach emerged as an attempt to take advantage of the nature of the writing code, which can be planned and revised unlimitedly, to give students a chance to think while writing because writing, in fact, is a thinking process (Brown, 2001). This recent approach is regarded as a positive innovation since teachers and students are allowed more meaningful interaction and more purposeful writing (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996).

In the process approach, teachers act like coaches. Williams (2003) points out that effective teachers work to change students behaviors in terms of composing, helping them identify and then emulate the behaviors of successful writers through intensive writing. When teachers intervene regularly in the learning process with encouraging students, correcting on the spot, praising things done right and giving reinforcement, students will adopt more effective writing behaviors. In the classroom, such intervention is applied by asking students to produce multiple drafts of an assignment. Teachers devote class time to revising drafts after feedback provided by teacher and fellows.

The general perceptions of writing instruction and of the ways students learn to write changed a lot with the emerge of a liberating concept (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Brown 2001). The writing-as-a-process approach freed instruction and instructors from imposed, artificial models and topics (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Williams (2003) maintains that process approach helps students adopt and practice the universal features of writing while giving them opportunities to discover their individual processes and find the best working ones for them. One of the significant innovations brought by the process approach depends on the realization the key factors to improve student writing which are asking students to write more often, providing effective feedback and requiring revisions based on that feedback (Williams, 2003).



As Grabe & Kaplan (1996) and Yan (2005) agree, the process approach to writing encourages meaningful writing on topics of importance or interest to the writer. Students become aware of judgments such as audience, voice, plans etc. As a consequence, a self-discovery and authorial voice comes out. Students do not write for teachers but for themselves. With the 'time' and 'feedback' support of teachers, the writing process turns into a process of discovery for students (Raimes, 1983).

In brief, the process of writing has become the main concern of writing instruction in recent years. Learners are encouraged to attempt and revise until they put down their ideas on paper, as they want to. Therefore, students focus on meaning more than the form. This emphasis on meaning makes the writing process more important both for students and instructors.

### **2.3. Assessment of Writing**

In all contexts, it is admitted that the assessment of writing is not a simple task. When assessing students' writing ability is considered, objectives and criterion should be clear. Thus, various tasks can be applied for each objective (Brown, 2004). Williams (2003) also asserts that writing teachers have a much harder job when it comes to assessing and evaluating because writing assessment requires considering a complex array of variables.

Writing skill has a special status within teaching writing communicatively, and it is the most difficult skill to learn for EFL learners. Since skills involved in writing are highly complicated, learners have to pay attention to macro level skills (planning, organization etc.) and micro level skills such as punctuation, spelling, word choice so on (Nezakatgoo, 2011). The change in writing theory from product to writing processes increased the popularity of portfolios. In EFL and ESL contexts, portfolios have become an instructional tool. The important dimensions of the writing process, which are generating ideas, drafting, redrafting, and editing are not sufficiently assessed in a one-shot attempt of traditional testing (Nezakatgoo, 2011).

Magnan (1985) asserts that practicing grammatical structures and forms, vocabulary and spelling, using information in context, expressing ideas, feelings, opinions, thoughts are all included in the purposes of writing for foreign language learners (cited in Aydin, 2010). Raimes (1987) also maintains the pedagogical purposes of writing in a foreign language such as reinforcement, training, imitation, communication, fluency, and learning. These facts show that assessing writing is much more than a test in which answers are right or wrong. As Hyland (2003) agrees, assessment is not simple as administrating exams and giving grades.

Process writing approach has brought alternative forms of assessment some of which are writing checklists, writing conferences, dialogue journals, learning logs, peer assessment, and self-assessment (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). In the process writing approach assessment is proposed not to be summative but formative (Kaplan & Grabe, 1996). Alternative assessments are used to focus on process rather than a product. The role of the teacher is not a judge but an interested reader in formative assessment. With constant feedback, the teacher helps students to improve their writing skills and gives opportunity to students to revise and edit as a part of writing assessment.

Hamp-Lyon and Condon (2000) think that evaluating ESL students' writing required large-scale assessments like portfolios because they supply a broader view of students' writing abilities and they are more appropriate than timed exams. Ruetten's study (1994) reports that competency exams are difficult for ESL students. In her study, both native and non-native speakers of English succeeded at a comparable pass rate when their portfolios were evaluated.

Assessing writing becomes a great difficulty when the objectives and assessing criteria do not truly match. In EFL setting, it is much more difficult for educators since they cannot decide to assess the writing performance or the language ability. As the literature indicates, the present study also aims to reveal the benefits of using portfolios as an alternative assessment tool in assessing writings' of EFL students.

#### **2.4. Portfolios**

In literature, portfolios have been defined in various ways, and its original definition comes from the collections of artists' (Sommers, 1991; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000). In order to understand the role of portfolios in writing classes, it is necessary to understand what portfolio means. Genesee & Upshur (1996) gives a definition of a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in given areas" (cited in Brown, 2004, p.99). Coombe and Barlow (2004) defines portfolio as "a purposeful collection of student writing over time that shows the stages in writing process a text has gone through and the stages of the writer's growth" (Coombe & Barlow, 2004, p.19). According to French (1992) a portfolio is "a purposeful, chronological collection of student work to reflect student development in one or more areas over time and student outcomes at one or more designated points in time" (p. 256).

According to Larson (1996), an ideal portfolio should be deliberately compiled, collected according to a plan for use by an identified reader for specific purposes. In addition,

students must participate in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for understanding the success, and evidence of student self-reflection (Paulson, Paulson & Meyer, 1991).

From the point of Chamot and O'Malley (1994) portfolios are useful not only for assessment but also for documenting learner growth and providing the connection between learner needs and instruction. They emphasize the usefulness of portfolios in monitoring student progress and adapting instruction to student needs.

Hamp-Lyon and Condon (2000) describe nine characteristics of good portfolios. The first one is collection. Portfolios naturally collect more than one performance. The second one is range. There should be a variety of forms, or genres written for various purposes and audiences. Context richness is the third characteristic. Writers' experiences are brought into the assessment as well. Delayed evaluation, which gives students opportunity to go back and revise, is another characteristic. Selection enables learners to choose pieces for assessment. Student-centered control is another characteristic, which makes learners to take responsibility for success. Reflection and self-assessment are so important that teachers put more control into the learners' hands and invite them to reflect on their writing and assess themselves. With the help of the portfolios, evaluators are able to ask questions related to the growth along specific parameters. Development over time is the final characteristic of good portfolios.

All these definitions mentioned above indicate a common point that a portfolio is a collection, which has a certain purpose. Portfolios can be used for different purposes, but the important point in here is that the objective in using portfolios should be set at the very beginning. Moreover, revealing learners' progress over time is an important function of portfolios.

#### **2.4.1. Content of Portfolios**

Curriculum of the institution, needs of the students, and the purpose of the portfolio are to be considered to decide what will go into a portfolio. The content of a portfolio can differ from a personal collection of students to a comprehensive array of student work and teacher records to standardized student assessments (Wolf & Siu-Runyan, 1996). However, the content of a portfolio is mainly determined by the purpose of the portfolio (Wolf & Siu-Runyan, 1996).

Seidel and Walter (1997, cited in Doğan, 2001) stress that portfolios are thoughtful collections of students work aimed for active and usually long-term review. Since there is a

purpose and a system in collecting students' works, choosing what to put in a portfolio requires a careful decision-making process (Seidel & Walter, 1997, cited in Doğan, 2001).

In a portfolio, there can be samples of creative work, tests, quizzes, homework, projects, and assignments, audiotapes of oral work, student diary entries, self-assessments, comments from peers, and comments from teachers (Hancock, 1994). Mabry (1999) states that a portfolio may also contain elements of reflection of the student's growth such as "narrative descriptions, grades, or other evaluations by teachers and others, official records, student reflection or self-evaluation, responses from parents, suggestions for future work, and audio or photographic records" (p. 17).

Siedel and Walter (1997, cited in Doğan, 2001) emphasize the significant function of a portfolio system, that is, portfolios reflect the growth, progress, weakness, talents, and efforts students have experienced over time. Demonstrating the student's progress in institution's instruction program is the one outstanding purpose of a portfolio (Cole et al., 2000) Therefore, Cole et al. (2000) suggest that a portfolio should include the student's personal goals, interests, and learning styles.

In order to promote self-assessment and self-reflection, a portfolio is expected to have self and peer assessment checklists and learning diaries. In terms of a valid and reliable basis for evaluation, educators expect to see drafts and final revisions. If formal and nontraditional evaluation is included in a portfolio containing many entries, portfolios can contribute to the evaluation of cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills (Cole et al., 2000).

#### **2.4.2 Types of Portfolios**

Although most of the portfolios presented in the literature have many common features, they are named differently regarding their types and models. Herman et al. (1996) discuss three types of portfolios: the showcase portfolio, the progress portfolio, and the working portfolio. In showcase portfolio, the student puts his/her best pieces only. The progress portfolio contains documents that are evidence of growth over time. The working portfolio has all work done for a course, or at least samples that represent the major learning goals or units of a course. Weigle (2002) adds that all the three portfolio types can be useful to motivate student performance. A progress portfolio can exhibit how far a student has come, a working portfolio can demonstrate the range of writing assignments that the student has accomplished, and the student's best work can be shown off in a showcase portfolio. O'Malley (1997) also divides portfolios into three types same with Herman et al. and names them as collection portfolio, a showcase portfolio and an assessment portfolio. Like the

working portfolio of Herman et al. (1996), the collection portfolio contains everything the student has produced. The assessment portfolio, which aims to help students and teachers in planning future learning activities, has the same purpose with the progress portfolio and demonstrates growth with respect to the determined instructional objectives (cited in Doğan, 2001).

Categorization of the portfolios by Wolf and Siu-Runyan (1996) is mainly based on the objectives of the portfolios. The first model is the ownership portfolio and its aim is to enable students to explore, extend, display, and reflect on their own learning. It focuses on student choice and self-assessment. Learners set goals for themselves and reflect on the development of their work by evaluating a variety of information in their portfolio. Feedback portfolios are constructed both by the student and teacher. They document ongoing student learning. They contain a variety of information coming from student reflections, teacher's records, and information from parents and peers. These portfolios are used to have a broader picture showing student's strengths and needs. The accountability portfolio is the third model. It is a selective collection of student work based on specific criteria, teacher records, and standardized assessments. The main point of this model is to assess student achievement for accountability and program evaluation.

Valencia and Calfee (1991) define another three-type categorization of portfolios. Showcase portfolios focus on student, documentation portfolios on student and teacher, and evaluation portfolios on teacher and administration.

The three major portfolio models described by Jenkins (1996) take native speakers of English into particular consideration to make them better writers. Benchmark portfolio, showcase portfolio, and collaborative portfolios provide instructional implications. The teacher or the institution determines which model to be used regarding a set of theoretical assumptions. These types differ from each other according to their central point. In showcase portfolio, the learner is the central point while the teacher is the central point in benchmark portfolio. In collaborative portfolio, both teacher and learner are in the center.

In deciding which type of portfolio to be used among all these models, teachers and administrations need to decide whether documenting growth, range, achievement, and accountability of the instruction will provide the most appropriate inferences for the specific purpose of the assessment (Weigle, 2002).

### **2.4.3. Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Tool**

Alternative assessment is the ‘umbrella’ term used for any non-traditional assessment in the testing literature (Butler, 1997, p. 5). There are many forms of performance assessments, such as checklists, role plays and group discussions, informal teacher observations, journals, reading logs, self-evaluation and self-assessment questionnaires and portfolio assessment, which are not described as tests (Council of Europe, 2001; Brown & Hudson, 1998).

Alternative assessment emerged from the idea that not all skills and competencies can be assessed through standardized tests. Portfolios came out to provide the needs of teachers and students. Johns (1991) claims that assessing ESL students’ writing abilities is more difficult than assessing native speakers’ in timed writing assessment (cited in Nezakatgoo, 2011). Song and August (2002) point out that establishing a time restraint limits students focus on skills needed for writing in a second language and highlights the cultural issues related to the process of writing. According to Hamp-Lyon and Condon (1993) portfolio assessment is superior to traditional holistic assessment. They argue that “portfolios provide a broader measure of what students can do, and because they replace the timed writing context, which has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against non-native writers” (Hamp-Lyon & Condon, 2000, p. 61). Douglas (2000) agrees and claims that portfolio assessment is particularly applicable to assess foreign-language learners’ writing. It is noted that commonly accepted methods of standardized testing paint a haphazard image of a students needs and their manner of learning. (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Portfolio-based assessment has become popular because they link teaching, learning, and assessment within the curriculum of the universities. According to Hamp-Lyon and Condon (2000), the greatest theoretical and practical value the process approach has a means of assessment is that it provides knowledge to teachers regarding the teaching and learning process. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) state one of the best qualities of portfolio assessment as it combines standard assessment approaches with many alternative assessment approaches. The use of portfolio assessment has given student centered learning more importance in comparison to more traditional teaching methods (Lee, 2001). Studies have shown that portfolio assessments have many benefits. Brown & Hudson (1998) note that for students, portfolio assessment can make students more creative and productive. For teachers, they can give information about a student’s strengths and weaknesses and give value to academic tasks. For institutions, they provide teachers with new and different ways to instruct and assess their students.

#### **2.4.4. Portfolio as a Self Assessment Tool**

Self-assessment occurs when a student monitors his/her performance over a period of time. “When a student records whether or not, or how often or how long a specific behavior has occurred, and then self-records this in some way, self-monitoring occurs” (Harris & Graham, 1996, p. 161).

Portfolios emphasize a number of valued qualities of self-assessment: student ownership, student centeredness, non-competitiveness, individual customizing, a more objective view of the writing, students’ self-selection, and student involvement in establishing evaluation criteria (Tierney et al., 1991, cited in Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). This means that self-evaluation is the key element in portfolio-based assessment. O’Malley and Chamot (1990) indicated that the most unique aspect of the portfolio is that it intrinsically calls for student reflection and self-assessment. The results of the process approach for students are three-fold according to research: students are able to take control and responsibility for their learning keeping in mind their personal learning goals and strategies, students' understanding of what they are learning widens, and the understanding that learning a language is a step by step process becomes evident to them.

Portfolio-based assessment provides evidence to learners by displaying what they have learnt so far and what they are able to do with ease. Hirvela and Pierson (2000) state that within ‘learner-directed’ evaluation, performance assessment enables students not to be an object of assessment but an active and creative participant in the evaluation process.

Portfolios can become very useful learning tools when they are used for self-assessment in educational contexts. Self-assessment is widely accepted as a key learning strategy for autonomous language learning (Harris, 1997). Writing portfolios as self-assessment tools provide self-evaluation through learning process. Borthwick (1995) maintains that students learn the features of good work, what needs to be considered and how to find the better one while choosing the best work for the portfolio. Furthermore, by helping students to assess their own strengths and weaknesses and motivating them to produce the better one, portfolios are excellent tools for students to present themselves more confidently (Johson & Rose, 1997).

#### **2.4.5. Benefits of Using Portfolios**

The portfolio is considered beneficial by many researchers because it allows both teachers and students to take active roles in assessment, fosters learning and tells a lot about the match between writing instruction and assessment. Nezakatgoo (2001) maintains that the use of portfolios as a method of assessment gives the students the confidence to write and continue to develop their skills and overcome their problems in writing. When focusing on writing as a process, students write drafts, go back, revise, and rewrite. Thus, students take responsibility for their own learning. Portfolios give students the opportunity to review their writing and decide which works they will present to their teachers as documents of their writing ability (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000). This authority causes the feeling of ownership and motivates students to be better writers.

Chamot and O'Malley list five advantages of using portfolios: "portfolio assessment is systematic, it provides visible evidence of student progress, it is accessible, it is focused and efficient, and portfolios are useful for making instructional design" (p. 127). They emphasize monitoring the learning process as a significant function of portfolios.

Nezakatgoo (2011) points out that "students benefit the most when they receive feedback while they are still working on a paper rather than after the paper has been graded" (p. 231). He suggests that students can write perfectly only when they have control of their writing with feedbacks coming from teachers and peers and solve the problems in writing effective compositions.

#### **2.4.6. Challenges of Using Portfolios**

Using portfolios brings a good number of benefits to writing classes and assessment of writing. On the other hand, there are some issues mentioned in the literature as challenges and disadvantages of portfolios.

Reliability and validity are challenging issues when portfolios are heavily used for assessing. Williams (1998) argue that if standards of implementation and outcomes are not determined, portfolio assessment will be unfair because the subjectivity of teachers will increase in evaluation. Portfolio assessment will be threatened by this unreliability because making the evaluation of classroom writing more objective, fairer, and more realistic is aimed with portfolio assessment. O'Malley and Pierce (1996) also assert that reliability needs to be based on performance rather than scores without preset criteria. Inter-rater reliability is another main problem for reliability issues of the portfolio. Since teachers are not used to this new model of assessment, providing consistency between scores can be difficult (Nezakatgoo,



2011). Nezakatgoo (2011) suggests rubrics pose a challenge because they require that the users be trained in accurate and effective use of the rubric. They must be made to agree on the validity of the academic and numerical points of the rubric. The rubrics should take into consideration development, organization, fluency, and mechanics (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Scores cannot be considered valid if there is not a high rate of reliability between readers. Defina (1992) maintains that portfolios can be used to determine a grade as long as both the teacher and the learner develop a well-defined scoring rubric.

Design decision issue is regarded as another challenge in implementing the portfolio (Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 1993). What should go into the portfolio and how they will be evaluated are the questions needed to be clarified before using portfolios. Deciding the purpose of the portfolio should also be discussed. The assessment criteria can be set after a consensus is reached related to these issues (Hamp-Lyon & Condon, 1993).

Portfolios are thought to be a time-consuming assessment tool for instructors. Planning portfolio tasks and lessons, coaching students on drafts, and helping them collect and choose their works naturally form a process-oriented course and consequently demand intensive labor and a significant amount of time from teachers (Song & August, 2002).

Elbow and Belanoff (1991) discuss the disadvantages of portfolio assessment on the point of teachers and weak students. They maintain that teachers feel more pressure because they might feel as if they have failed with their students' failure. Also, some teachers feel that portfolios dominate their classes too much. Finally, lazy students can depend too much on the help they receive from their teachers and peers due to the emphasis on revision.

To conclude, the portfolio has several disadvantages and advantages with regard to writing instructions. Although the problems are not easy to handle, it might be beneficial if the balance between benefits and challenges is provided.

## CHAPTER 3

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research procedure of the study. Information about the writing classes at Preparatory School of Zirve University and the participants, the design of the study, data collection tools, and data analysis methods are reported respectively.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The ultimate goal of the study was to implement a portfolio system at Preparatory School of Zirve University. Action research was the most suitable type of research to reach this goal as it involves a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring teaching contexts (Burns, 2010). Action Research has four cycles:

1. *Planning*: identifying a problem or issue and developing a plan of action to improve what is already happening.
2. *Action*: Implementing the plan.
3. *Observation*: Observing the effects of the action and collecting data.
4. *Reflection*: Reflecting on, evaluating and describing the effects of the action (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988 cited in Burns, 2010, p. 9).

#### 3.2. Research Questions

This study was designed to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. How can I implement the use of portfolio in writing classes at a preparatory school in the university context?
2. Does involvement in portfolios help Preparatory School students to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing?

#### 3.3. Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were 17 level C (intermediate level) students from Zirve University Preparatory School. 16 of them started preparatory year from level A (elementary level). One participant was a repeater, which means he failed in level C (intermediate) in the previous term and was still a level C (intermediate) student. The participants of the study were selected using convenience-sampling method. Convenient sampling is defined as “a group of individuals who (conveniently) are available for study” (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p. 99).

### **3.4. Data Collection Instruments**

The study employed a qualitative research method. When researchers are more interested in the quality of a particular activity than in how often it occurs or how it would otherwise be evaluated, qualitative research methods are used (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Qualitative research methods frequently refer to research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The main data collection tool used in this study was a diary kept by the researcher throughout the term. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) define diary as, “a personal statement of the researcher’s feelings, opinions, and perceptions about others with whom he or she comes in contact during the course of his or her work” (p. 513). The researcher took notes in her diary after each class was over. Basically the researcher wrote her own reflections on what was done during the classes. Many details referring to her opinions, feelings, and observations about her classes and especially her students’ reactions towards the implementation of the process approach and keeping portfolios were written down. The second data collection tool was the cover letters written by the participant students at the end of the term. Students were asked to write cover letters to the teacher by answering the following questions:

1. Evaluate each piece of writing in your portfolio and write your strengths and weaknesses by giving examples from your writing to support what you say.
2. Which is your favorite piece? Why?
3. What is your least favorite piece? Why?
4. What still needs improvement?
5. What do you know now that you didn’t know before?
6. What can you do that you couldn’t do now?
7. What techniques seem to help you most? Why? (Adapted from Bullock, 2009)

### **3.5. Procedures**

This study was carried out by the researcher in one of her writing classes using the cycles of action research (AR). As Burns (2010) points out, AR is an appealing way to look more closely at puzzling classroom issues for a teacher who is reflective and committed to developing as a thinking professional. The research took place in the third term of the preparatory year, which started on 28<sup>th</sup> January and finished on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2013. It was an eight-week teaching term. The main goal and objectives of Zirve University level C writing program were defined as in the following:

Main goal: Students will be able to write five-paragraph essays on a given topic and develop an idea in an organized way.

Objectives: By the end of level C, a student will be able to;

- write an introduction, body and conclusion paragraph.
- express the main idea in a well-written thesis statement.
- give enough background information about the topic.
- write a hook to get readers' attention.
- give information about a topic (explanatory essay)
- compare and contrast two people, things etc. (compare-contrast essay)
- present arguments for or against a position.
- follow process writing steps (brainstorming, outlining, writing first draft, editing, writing final draft)

Writing classes were five hours a week. During the eight-week study, students practiced 3 genres: expository, compare-contrast, and persuasive essays. A semi-structured five-step plan was developed for each genre:

1<sup>st</sup> step: Introduction to the genre. For introducing the genres, sample essays and PowerPoint presentations were used. Relevant grammatical structures and vocabulary were also revised and practiced.

2<sup>nd</sup> step: Introduction to pre-writing techniques. Students were given 4 topics for each genre. Visual aids, discussion groups, mind maps were used to help students gather ideas about the topics of the week. They chose their topic and prepared outlines. Related grammatical structures, vocabulary, and transitions were introduced or revised.

3<sup>rd</sup> step: Introduction to drafting. Students wrote their first drafts and received instant feedback from the teacher while they were drafting.

4<sup>th</sup> step: Introduction to revision. Students were given checklists to revise and edit their first draft. Then, they checked their peers' paper with the checklists.

5<sup>th</sup> step: Introduction to teacher conference. Students participated in approximately 10-minute teacher-student conferences. They received individual feedback from the teacher. After taking feedback, they revised their final drafts and put them into their folders.

### **3.6. An Eight Week Writing Portfolio Instruction**

The main focus of my study was to implement a writing portfolio system in a university context. To achieve this aim I prepared a writing portfolio instruction for eight weeks. The underlying framework of this writing program was to follow the five steps of process writing for three genres to be taught and establishing teacher conferences with the students to give feedback.

#### **3.6.1. Week 1**

##### **Aim:**

1. Students will learn three of the most important elements of good writing- “subject, purpose and an audience” (Blanchard & Root, 2004, p. 4).
2. Students will experience the writing process: *Prewriting* “generating ideas, planning, and organizing ideas”, *Writing* “using ideas to write a first draft”, *Revising, and Editing* “improving what has been written” (Blanchard & Root, 2004, p. 11).

##### **Materials Used:**

- A sample essay to present parts of an essay and a handout showing the parts of an essay, practice activities on purpose and audience.

##### **Procedures followed:**

1. Presentation of the elements of good writing- *subject, purpose and an audience*.
2. Introduction to the essay format through a discussion using a model essay and a handout showing the parts of an essay.
3. Practice of writing introductory paragraphs in groups for different audiences and purposes.
4. Introduction to the steps of the writing process (brainstorming, outlining, drafting, revising, and final drafting) using a presentation on mind maps, outlining sheets and sample essays.
5. Practice activities using mind maps, organizers, brainstorming and outlining in groups on different topics.

### 3.6.2 Week 2

#### **Aim:**

1. Students will be able to write explanatory essay.
2. Students will be able to brainstorm to gather ideas and prepare an outline accordingly.

#### **Materials used:**

- Sample essays, a video prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Culture to advertise touristic places of Turkey (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5s3kSD4JIrI>), a mind map, an outline sheet, practice activities on related transitions.

#### **Procedures followed:**

1. Introduction to the basics of explanatory essay using a model.
2. Practice of the elements of the essay they learnt in week 1 in groups with sample essays.
3. Writing the first drafts on the topic given. The writing prompt was: *“Imagine that you are studying at a university abroad. You are asked to write for the weekly school magazine, explaining why international students should visit Turkey as a tourist.”*
4. Practicing brainstorming activities using mind maps.
5. Watching a video prepared by the Turkish Ministry of Culture to advertise touristic places of Turkey to help them gather some more ideas.
6. Practicing outlining using an organizer sheet.
7. Receiving feedback about outlines prepared.
8. Introduction to transitions such as ‘in addition, however, therefore’.
9. Practice activities on the use of transitions and punctuation.

### 3.6.3 Week 3

#### **Aim:**

1. Students will experience writing their first drafts, receive feedback from the teacher, revise their drafts and write the final draft.

#### **Materials used:**

- A PowerPoint presentation on subject-verb and noun-pronoun agreements.

#### **Procedures followed:**

1. A teacher presentation on subject-verb and noun-pronoun agreements, which is a problematic area for students in general.
2. Writing the first draft on a given topic.
3. Attending teacher conference to receive feedback about the first draft.

4. Writing the second drafts on the same topic.
5. Receiving feedback about the second drafts.
6. Editing the final drafts.

#### **3.6.4. Week 4**

##### **Aim:**

1. Students will learn compare-contrast essay.
2. Students will experience using Venn diagrams for brainstorming.
3. Students will learn transitions that can be used while comparing and contrasting.

##### **Materials Used:**

- A sample essay, Venn diagram sheets, outline sheet, worksheet for transitions.

##### **Procedures followed:**

1. Introduction to the basics of compare-contrast essays using a model.
2. A discussion the purpose of the model essay.
3. Preparing the outline of the sample essay using an outline sheet given.
4. Introduction to the organization of compare-contrast essays using the sample and its outline.
5. Practicing brainstorming technique using a venn diagram.
6. Practicing outlining as a whole class activity.
7. Introduction to transitions and conducting related practice activities.
8. Writing one paragraph of the essay using the outline prepared working in groups of 5.

#### **3.6.5 Week 5**

##### **Aim:**

1. Students will make brainstorming, outlining and write their first comparison and contrast essay draft.

##### **Materials used:**

- The essay they wrote as the whole class in week 3, a Venn diagram sheet, an outline sheet.

##### **Procedures followed:**

1. The teacher combined the paragraphs written in groups on week 3 and gave feedback to the whole class through it.

2. Topics were given. As the whole class, we discussed the topics for brainstorming and students took note at the same time.
3. Students were asked to choose their topic and made their outlines.
4. Students wrote their first draft.

### **3.6.6 Week 6**

#### **Aim:**

1. Student will self-edit their first drafts and receive feedback from the teacher and write their second drafts.

#### **Materials used:**

- A presentation on checklists for comparison and contrast essays.

#### **Procedures followed:**

1. Introduction to checklists using a PowerPoint presentation.
2. A group discussion on the types of questions to be included in checklists.
3. A whole class discussion on the types of questions to be used in checklists.
4. Comparison of a ready-made checklist and the one produced by the students.
5. A group and a whole class discussion on the types of questions to be used in checklists for comparison and contrast essays.
6. Revision of essays using the checklist.
7. Student-teacher conferences.

### **3.6.7. Week 7**

#### **Aim:**

1. Students will learn writing an argumentative essay.

#### **Materials used:**

- Activities for arguments and counterarguments, a presentation on sample essays, double-lists for brainstorming, a handout on useful language, a graphic organizer.

#### **Procedures followed:**

1. Pair-work activities to practice arguments and counterarguments.
2. Introduction to persuasive essay using a sample.
3. Introduction to double-lists and practice activities through pair work.
4. A discussion on the language used in persuasive essays.
5. Distribution of topics.



6. A brainstorming session by using double-lists and preparation of an outline using a graphic organizer.

### **3.6.8. Week 8**

#### **Aim:**

1. Students will be able to write a persuasive essay, experience self and peer editing, receive feedback from the teacher and write their second drafts.

#### **Materials used:**

- Checklists for self-editing and peer editing.

#### **Procedures followed:**

1. Students wrote their first drafts.
2. Students revised their drafts and edited their drafts using the checklist.
3. Students checked their peers' essays using the checklist. They received and gave feedback to their peers.
4. Students received feedback from the teacher.
5. Students wrote their second drafts.
6. Students reflected on their written products in their portfolios and wrote a cover letter to the teacher.

### **3.7. Data Analysis**

The data gained through the researcher's diary and cover letters were exposed to content analysis. Content analysis is defined by Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, (2012, p. 478) as "a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications." In other words, it is the analysis of the usually written contents of a communication.

## CHAPTER 4

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the analysis of the data obtained from the researcher's diary and the cover letters written by the participant students. The first three sections present the findings for the research question 1 under three categories: cycles of process approach, keeping portfolio from the teacher's perspective and keeping portfolio from students' perspective. The last section presents the findings for the second research question: Does involvement in portfolios help Preparatory School students to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing?

#### 4.1 Cycles of the Process Approach

##### 4.1.1. Pre-Writing

The first weeks of the instruction revealed that students had some background knowledge about the steps of the writing process. However, they were not able to match this knowledge to their own writing classes at school. The following diary entry supports this:

"I asked students '*what should you do before start writing?*' I could not get proper answers. Then I exemplified the question and asked them: '*imagine that Elif Şafak or Orhan Pamuk is going to write a love story that takes place in Gaziantep or in Kahramanmaraş or Şanlıurfa. The problem is they have never been to these cities. What should they do to write a good story?*' When I asked this question, I got good answers: '*...they should come here, make friends so they know Antep people, they should eat Antep food, read books about Antep, make online research, visit historical places...*' From these answers we concluded that a writer needs ideas first to be able to write something."

Since there are no composition classes in formal education, my students had never written compositions even in Turkish, and they had not practiced the processes of writing. Moreover, they were not aware of the important elements of a good writing- *subject, purpose, and audience*. Furthermore, their audience had always been their class teacher. They were not able to consider the audience and purpose while writing. The entry below shows this:

"I showed two different introduction paragraphs of an essay about the advantages of Facebook written for two different teachers. One of the paragraphs had more detailed

background information about Facebook and written by the student of an old teacher who is not good at technology while the other one, written by one of my students, had more general background information. I asked the question “*Why do these two paragraphs have different background information while they are about the same topic?*” They discussed their points of views in pairs but could not find an answer to my question. The answers were generally focused on the purpose. Then I had to change my question and asked which paragraph was more comprehensible for the old teacher. This time they found the answer, and we discussed that it was a good thing to consider the audience of our essays before starting to write.”

Teaching the planning stage was easier since they were familiar with paragraph and essay format. On week 1, after activities with mind maps, I asked them to prepare a plan as if they were going to write an essay. Almost all of them chose three strong ideas from brainstorming papers because they knew that they were going to write three body paragraphs. However, they were reluctant to write a more-detailed plan. The reason for this was that they needed more time to think and to concentrate on the topic. At this point I realized that the class time and the atmosphere of the class were important factors both in brainstorming and planning stages. In the afternoon sessions, my students were usually too tired to think and write. Sometimes I changed my weekly plan and moved pre-writing activities to the morning sessions. The other solution was using pair and group activities. During the term, finding ideas became the most difficult step for my students. My solution for this was to make brainstorming and planning in groups first, and then with the whole class. As I mentioned in my diary on week 4:

“I reflected the topics of the week using the projector and asked them to discuss the topics one by one together. However, they were too silent. I think they were shy and reluctant to speak and share their ideas. I tried to encourage them to say whatever comes to their mind since it was a brainstorming activity but it did not work. They seemed tired too. Then I changed my mind and made them work in groups of four. I asked them to discuss each topic in their groups and to write the ideas that they came up with. While they were discussing, I divided the board into four sections. After they finished, one student from each group came to the board and wrote down the ideas they found. The class was too noisy, but they had so much fun while they were discussing. We talked very briefly about what they wrote on the board. They got help from the board and prepared their outlines.”

Watching the video was another helpful and fun activity for pre-writing stages. The second week was the week that my students were going to write their first essays. I thought visual materials would be supportive in the beginning. As I noted in my diary in week 3:

“We watched the video advertising the touristic places of Turkey. I told them to take notes while they were watching it. The video was 13 minutes long. At the end of the video, I checked the student notes and outlines to give feedback. There were no problems.

The students did not need to watch the video again or discuss the topic together although they were offered the opportunity to do so. Brainstorming and planning did not take much time and it went more easily than I thought. They did not ask for help from their peers or me. They worked individually.”

The last genre of the term, persuasive essay, appeared to be the most complicated and a little bit scary for the students because they wrote one extra paragraph for counter-arguments and refutation. Consequently, I spent more time than usual for brainstorming and planning. During pre-writing, I emphasized critical thinking a lot and this was the most difficult part for me. Because my students had almost no writing experience, it was easier for them to write about personal or appealing topics. However, in week 6 they were required to state their own argument about a controversial topic. Therefore, I did not use group activities a lot in week 6. I used pair work activities in the beginning to introduce argument and counter-argument and for brainstorming. In the following classes, I led them to brainstorm and plan individually. Regarding this point, I noted in my diary:

“I gave five controversial questions. I asked them to write their argument. Then pairs exchanged their answers and wrote a counter-argument to their friend’s argument. After this activity, we concluded that we should think like two persons while brainstorming and planning.”

“I gave the topics. I handed out double-list sheets for brainstorming and a graphic organizer. After everybody prepared their plans, I asked them to come together with others who chose the same topic and compare their outlines. I also told them they could improve their plans after their discussion.”

In eight weeks, we worked on three genres. We also focused on three different brainstorming techniques using the sheets with mind maps, Venn diagrams and tables drawn on them. These papers encouraged my students to go through the pre-writing stage easily as the sheets showed them some practical ways to make brainstorming and planning. Pre-writing activities also became the most communicative part of the class. Through brainstorming, the classes were almost completely student-centered. This activity helped my students to give up the feeling that writing was always boring.

#### **4.1.2. Drafting**

Our students always write their first drafts in class time because of the preparatory school policy. The reason behind this policy is to avoid plagiarism, which is still not taken seriously by our students. Since there is not a punishment policy determined by the administration of the school, we have tried to deal with it in our own ways. However, in a highly-populated preparatory school, it is very difficult to prevent students from sharing their drafts with their friends at lower levels or to cope with Internet plagiarism, which provides students with numerous sample essays. Thus, writing teachers ask students to write their first drafts in the classroom under the teachers' supervision.

In week 3, before my students started to write, I reminded them subject-verb and pronoun-noun agreement. Because it was one of the most problematic areas for our students, I wanted them to be careful while drafting. However, it did not really work. It was the first time that they were writing an essay, so they focused highly on content rather than the language. They were too worried about writing impressive sentences. They tried a lot to translate Turkish sentences in their mind into English. My task of monitoring students' productions turned into being a translator. Regarding this point, I wrote down the following in my diary:

“While the students were writing their first drafts, I was walking around the classroom to observe, give instant feedback and to encourage them to write. After ten minutes, everybody was asking a word in English or telling sentences to me to be translated into Turkish. The class became too noisy. I told them to use their dictionaries instead of asking me, but it didn't work well because they were used to using electronic dictionaries. They had not known how to use a dictionary properly, for this reason they usually used awkward words that I had not heard at all. They were supposed to finish by the end of the class but they couldn't. It was too exhausting for me.”

After this first draft experience, I changed the way I monitored and guided my students, as I did not want my students to be dependent on me. In week 5, I intended to give feedback only after they finished drafting. However, my students felt a little bit insecure without taking my approval while drafting. It was probably because they wanted to be sure that they were going on the right way instead of revising the whole essay in the end. Thus, I checked and gave instant feedback while they were writing compare-contrast essays. It was not very exhausting for me. I recorded this session in my diary as:

“I told my students that they could have an individual conference with me when they finished writing their first paragraphs. During the conference, I gave only holistic feedback regarding the content and the purpose of the essay. I checked introduction paragraphs if they were written from general to specific and if there was a thesis statement. I also advised them to avoid using dictionary all the time. I encouraged them to ask for help from their peers rather than me when they could not remember a word. It worked very well. The strong helped the weak, and also they realized they could use a synonym instead of wasting time to find the exact word.”

In the final week, I realized that my students were aware of what they were doing and they were more self-confident than the beginning of the study. They were focused on drafting. They asked for my help only when they were stuck or had some hesitations. I wrote in my diary:

“They wrote their first drafts. They were really concentrating and quiet. I walked around the class a couple of times to see if they were writing according to their plan. I gave some suggestions to improve some parts of their essay. Most of them finished their first drafts at the end of the class.”

I can say that at the end of the term, a writing culture was formed in my class. While drafting, I tried to act like a reader rather than a judge to encourage them to take risks while composing.

#### **4.1.3. Revising and Editing**

The nature of process approach establishes communication between the teacher and the students through giving and receiving feedback. In order to accomplish this feature of process approach, I spent class hours for giving individual feedback instead of marking papers in my office and giving the papers back to be edited. It was the first time that individual feedback was given in our writing classes. Moreover, as my students stated in their cover letters, it was the most helpful thing I did during the term. As far as I observed, the reasons for that were:

1. The students were not discouraged when they got back papers full of red-pen marks.
2. Conferences strengthened our relationship.
3. It was easier for students to understand their errors with the help of guiding questions I asked during conferences rather than struggling to understand error codes.

4. Hearing personal praises was more encouraging than seeing usual ‘Thank you!, Good job! etc.’ notes on the papers.
5. Individual feedback made students realize that they also communicated with me through their essays. Writing became more meaningful and enjoyable for students when we discussed not only the use of language but also their ideas. Reading and discussing essays together with students made me focused more on the content rather than grammatical errors, which most Turkish writing teachers do as soon as they get the red pen. I was more careful not to mark every grammar mistake since I felt the immediate reaction of students. Their discouraged mood led to me giving feedback in a more constructive way.

In week 6, I introduced checklists for revising and editing. In order to make it more meaningful and help students understand its purpose, I asked them to write down questions they could ask themselves to be sure that they wrote a good essay. They were good at finding revision questions since the elements of a good essay were defined in a certain way. However, they could not find specific questions for editing since they were not aware of their weaknesses in language conventions. Then, they were given a checklist to compare the questions with the questions they offered. I asked them if there was a question to be added or omitted to share the control with them over their own essays.

In the final week of writing instruction, having given feedback for a period of time and realized common and repetitive errors, I added some specific editing questions into the checklist. I noted in my diary:

“Noun-pronoun, subject-verb agreement error is still a big problem. They don’t pay enough attention and do the same mistakes again and again. After I handed out the checklist and they edited their work, I wrote samples of mistake on the board (*e.g. this students, every people, many student, some book, she/he study*) and asked them to edit the example situations once again considering only subject-verb and noun-pronoun agreement. When I gave examples of mistakes, it worked and they corrected some more mistakes.”

Peer editing was conducted in the final week after the students experienced revising and editing steps of the writing process. After they edited their own papers, I collected the papers and gave them the papers back randomly. I asked them to edit the paper using the checklist. I warned them not to correct the mistakes but to use a sign showing the mistake. I did not have time to give them some error codes that they could have used. Thus, they used checklist, put marks for certain grammar errors, and then they came together and gave

feedback to each other. This activity went well with strong-weak pairs. Some did not take it seriously because they did not have self-confidence in writing. They thought they were not capable of giving feedback. Some thought peer feedback would not be as useful as my feedback. I noted the following in my diary:

“I asked them to read and check their essays using the checklist. After 15 minutes, they came together to discuss their papers. I gave them 20 minutes- 10 for giving, 10 for receiving feedback. Some of them did it seriously and needed more time. Especially when the strong one gave feedback to the weak one. Some of them did it just because I told them to do so and finished earlier. Especially the weak ones did not because they said they were already bad writers. They took feedback but were not eager to give feedback to their peers.”

I suppose that it would have been better if I had not given the papers randomly. I could have matched them as the strong and the weak. My intention in matching them randomly was to give the impression that no matter being a good writer or not, everybody could help each other and give feedback at one point. I tried to do that as in the following:

“Caner had Şenay’s paper. He said there was no need to look at her paper because she was a student above the level. Her English was almost perfect. To make him read the paper, I told him he could give feedback about the content, her ideas. I told him that he could have more original ideas. He tried to do that.”

After peer feedback sessions, I gave individual feedback. I noticed that they corrected their simple mistakes in light of peer feedback. However, they did not make changes when they did not agree with their peers on the errors. They preferred to ask me if they or their peer was correct. Still, there was a beneficial and helpful interaction in the classroom. They noticed that reading an essay was different from writing. They became aware of the elements we, writing teachers, focus on while reading and evaluating writing papers. In terms of content, my students were not good at expressing their thoughts clearly and simply. They were always missing some important details that hindered conveying the message. The reason for this was that they are used to give up trying when they were stuck with the language. When they could not find the correct word or structure, they did not use to write and move onto another idea. With peer feedback, I also aimed to show them that writing was a tool for communication. They realized this when they could not understand their peer’s paper and had to ask what he/she meant during the conferences. Moreover, they had fun when their role changed and acted like a teacher.

Feedback conferences went well except one problem. While I was giving feedback to one student, the rest of the students were free. I could not find meaningful activities related to



the syllabus because feedback was the last step of the process. I gave a couple of editing activities, but they did not pay much attention since I did not have chance to monitor them during conferences. The ones who got feedback were supposed to write their second drafts. However, the ones waiting for their turn enjoyed that free time of the class. This issue is now in my agenda for the next terms.

During the term, revising and editing was the step that almost none of my students missed or ignored. They were aware of the need for feedback to learn the language and write better. They were eager to ask my help since I kept saying that I was there to cooperate with them. As far as I observed, writing classes became more meaningful for students with this writing process.

#### **4.2. Keeping Portfolios from Students' Perspective**

My students kept '*writing portfolios*' for the first time in this study. The idea of writing several drafts seemed as an unnecessary procedure and a burden at first. Although I informed them about what a portfolio was and its aim, they could not appreciate how it worked for their learning process until the end of the term.

Writing used to be a painful and fearful activity for these students before portfolios because the students did not used to follow the steps of composing. Without brainstorming and planning, their only concern was putting down some correct sentences about the topic. Thus, they were usually stuck in the middle of drafting and lost their enthusiasm in writing. In particular, in midterm and final exams, this usually caused anxiety and panic, so writing was perceived as an unachievable skill. However, after they had learnt what they should do before drafting, their perception for writing changed. When they had a plan, they felt secure while drafting. They became self-confident and did not give up trying to become a good writer. In my diary I noted the following in week 5:

“For the first time in my teaching life, I heard “*teacher we do not understand how time passes in your classes.*” It is the most motivating thing I have heard in this term.”

There is another entry like this from week 8:

“It was surprising that I had to leave class silently for the break because the students were too focused to realize that it was a break time. I did not say anything and left the room silently. They took their break in the next lesson when they needed.”

Portfolios had a great contribution in learning how to write. Writing classes provided our students a chance to take risks in producing the language. Since they always had another chance to write again and correct the errors, they were practicing the recently learnt structures

and words. After a while, they realized that writing, in fact, was a good opportunity to learn grammar because they also received feedback from me about their grammatical errors and understood what they were doing wrong and how they could correct them. Drafts with my marks and notes on them became a guide to remember the correct use of language.

In previous terms, I had to deal with students who did not write or want to write. I had students who neither participated class activities nor did their assignments. With the process approach to teaching writing and the portfolios, my classes became more student-centered. All activities were to prepare them for the writing tasks and they were supposed to write in the classroom. My role was also being a reader or a guide rather than a teacher who does the entire job in the classroom. Therefore, students had to participate in all activities, write and get feedback. This approach helped to establish a writing culture in my class. After two weeks, my students knew what they were supposed to do in our classes.

Portfolios were helpful in getting ready for the midterm and final examinations. The students could easily identify their weaknesses and study for the exams focusing on their weaknesses. This helped them develop their own learning strategies in becoming good writers.

The most significant advantage of portfolios was receiving individual feedback. The students were able to notice their weaknesses. Since they knew what they should do to improve and their priorities in developing themselves, they showed a faster and continuous development. When drafts showed that their writing was improving week by week since the beginning of the term, they became motivated to write and get feedback.

Portfolios also had some drawbacks for students. It was stressful because they were supposed to keep their drafts until the end of the term. Moreover, my students were not responsible students. Every week I heard excuses about losing or forgetting drafts somewhere and coming to the class unprepared. I had to expand my rules for handing in the essays on time and showed them some toleration not to discourage them.

### **4.3 Keeping Portfolios from the Teacher's Perspective**

In this study, portfolios came out to be a guide showing to what extent my instruction worked and things I needed to revise and improve. They also kept me motivated and supported me with its reflective feature.

Portfolios helped a lot in tracking my students' improvement individually. Before portfolios, I could have a general idea about my class. I could identify the weaknesses or strengths in terms of whole class. Portfolios provided me the opportunity to follow each

student's improvement. I was able to give more effective feedback since I knew for which errors they needed more help. Moreover, portfolios led me to vary my error correction techniques according to the students' specific needs.

Observing my students' improvement through portfolios was a great source of motivation for me. Portfolios were outputs of my instruction. Their writing performances were the results of my efforts. Thus, while portfolios of successful students motivated me, there were times when I was demotivated because of some students whose portfolios showed improvement below my expectations.

Portfolios had one disadvantage for me, which in fact comes from the nature of the process approach. Giving individual feedback and monitoring continuously during drafting requires too much energy. From time to time, I felt too exhausted to read and give feedback. It was hard to keep my mind fresh and work effectively.

#### **4.4 The role of portfolios for Preparatory School Students in Becoming Aware of Their Strengths and Weaknesses**

The cover letters written at the end of the term for self-reflection revealed that portfolios helped my students in identifying their weaknesses and strengths in writing. It also indicated common strengths and weaknesses that may be related to my instruction.

As many of them stated in their cover letters, writing a hook was the most difficult part of the essay to teach because it requires creativity as well as knowledge. Most of my students lacked knowledge of quotations, proverbs and were not creative enough to ask catchy questions or exclamatory sentences. They spent a great deal of time trying for formulate a thought-provoking sentence. Thus, I lowered my expectations about writing hooks and did not give feedback for that, and also told them not to worry about catchy beginnings. Some of them were also aware that they could not write hook as reflected in some cover letters:

Özden: Besides, there are my weaknesses such as doing hook and impressive words.

Erhan: My weakness is introduction and thesis statement. I have to be careful about hook and thesis statement.

Melek: My weakness is hook because hook is very hard. For example, I didn't find anything to write.

Kamil: My weakness is introduction because I can't find anything for hook and thesis statement.

Mehmet: My weakness is introduction and conclusion because I can't find hook.

While choosing their favorite and the least favorite essays, the students considered their strengths and weaknesses. Their choice also revealed that they focused on the content more than the language. They expressed themselves better when they liked the topic or involved in the topic. Regarding this aspect, they commented as in the following:

İbrahim: My favorite piece is ‘best leader’ for I wrote a good introduction.

Özden: I have a favorite essay. Its name is Protecting Nature. I researched organizations on Internet. I learned different information about nature thanks to essay. I used a lot of transitions in essay. Also, organization of essay was better than other essays.

Erhan: My favorite essay is Soul Mate. Since it has a beautiful topic. I also wrote very nice.

Ruken: My favorite piece is ‘changes’ since I thought a short time and I didn’t have difficult.

Şehriban: My best essay is ‘new life’ since that’s my last essay. I am successful nowadays.

Büşra: My favorite piece is ‘My Idols’ because I wrote two people in my life. I expressed myself better.

Melek: “My favorite piece ‘Strong leaders’ since I could find example a lot. Also I have little mistake.”

Kamil: My favorite essay is Leaders because in this portfolio I didn’t have mistake.”

Amer Akdi: The best paragraph I have written up to now is about personality. I like to write about personality of someone I like.

Mehmet: My favorite essay is ‘why do tourists visit Turkey?’ because I used different words in this essay. Also, I wrote great introduction and conclusion in this essay.

Demet: My favorite piece is important leaders because I like to write my favorite leaders. I write good sentences.

Yasemin: My favorite piece is ‘ways to be happy’ because I explain what I do. Therefore, I didn’t have difficulty.

Gizem: My favorite portfolio is ‘Men and Women’ because I can find interesting and attractive sentences.

Moreover, they were able to observe their growth through the term. Many of them did not like their first essays because it was their first try to write a five-paragraph essay. They chose the least favorite pieces and explained why:

İbrahim: My least favorite piece is 'My beautiful country' for I could not write a good body.

Enes: Women's and men's way of being happy. I couldn't organize well.

Özden: I don't like first essay. Although I used wrong vocabularies, organization of essay was good.

Kamil: My least favorite essay is 'A Nice Country' while I was writing, I had difficult.

Erhan: I don't like the topic 'Men and Women'. Since, I thought nothing. This topic is terrible for me.

Ruken: My least piece is 'differences between a woman and a man' because I don't understand context, so I don't write.

Melek: My least favorite piece is 'best country' since it was my first writing. It has a lot of mistakes. I had difficulty.

Demet: My least favorite essay is 'Visit Turkey' because I did not pay attention. I made a lot of mistakes. My introduction was bad.

Mehmet: My least favorite essay is my country because when I passed level C, I couldn't know long essay.

Yasemin: My least favorite piece is Different Lives because it was my first writing in level C.

Gizem: My least favorite essay is 'My beautiful country' because this portfolio is first writing. I can't find good details.

At the end of the term, they detected what needed to be improved in their writing. Most of them wanted to improve writing a hook as they mentioned before. By looking at their drafts, they identified their needs:

Erhan: I need to learn grammar and more words.

Ruken: I need to improve introduction and hook.

Demet: I need to improve my body. I don't write enough sentences.

Mehmet: I need to learn a lot of words for my writing.

Their portfolios also reflected what they had learnt in this term. Apparently writing a five-paragraph essay was the most significant objective of the term that was achieved. Furthermore, transitions and conjunctions were in our syllabus and many of them had not been taught these before. It was seen that transitions assisted them a lot in connecting and organizing ideas. They all agreed that transitions were useful in expressing themselves:

Erhan: I did not know some of the conjunctions now I learned. Also I learned how to write better organized.

Özden: Besides, I learned a lot of transitions such as that's why, due to, in spite of, despite, therefore, moreover, furthermore and so on. Finally, I learned the most important parts of the essay. Essay should have three main parts as introduction, body, and conclusion part....

Şehriban: When I started level C, I didn't write essay.

Büşra: I know that I write an introduction and a conclusion now.

Demet: I learned a lot of conjunctions. Those conjunctions are despite, yet, since, however, therefore etc.

Melek: I didn't know 'in spite of', despite, in consequence, therefore and that's why before, yet I know these.

Kamil: I didn't know 'despite' before but now I know this. I didn't know to use because, however, yet, therefore but now I know these and I can use these while writing.

Mehmet: I didn't know 'for instance, because of, thanks to, in consequence, besides, and yet' but now I can use these.

Amer: I learned a little about the conjunctions.

Gizem: I didn't know conjunction before but now I can write them. I didn't know to use yet, since, however etc.

The cover letters showed that portfolios help students to reflect on what they had learned. The students were also good at evaluating their performance successfully. Portfolios also helped me to assess whether the objectives of the term were achieved or not. Cover letters presented a big picture of the whole instruction and contributed in evaluation of the term by showing which parts of the instruction worked well, which techniques were useful and which were not.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5. CONCLUSION

This chapter discusses the conclusion of the present study that arose from the data findings. The purpose of the study and summary of the findings are presented first. The next section provides the implications concluded from the study with the recommendations for further studies. Finally, the limitations of the study are presented.

#### 5.1. Summary of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to implement the use of portfolio at a preparatory school. In particular, the present study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. How can I implement the use of portfolio in writing classes at a preparatory school in the university context?
2. Does involvement in portfolios help Preparatory School students to become aware of their strengths & weaknesses in writing?

The most appropriate research method for this study was action research. Thus, an eight-week course of writing instruction was prepared for this study based on the process approach to writing. Williams (2003) believes that as one of the significant innovations of the process approach, it is realized that the key to improving student writing is formed by three factors which are asking students to write often, giving frequent feedback on work in progress and requiring numerous revisions based on that feedback. Depending on the universal features of the composing process – planning, drafting, revising, the use of portfolio was applied in writing classes to help students adopt and practice the universal features of writing and give them an opportunity to discover their individual progress.

An eight-week course of writing instruction was prepared for this study. 17 students were taught 3 genres - explanatory, compare-contrast, and persuasive essay- throughout the term. For each genre, five steps of writing – brainstorming, planning, drafting, revising and writing final draft - were followed. The students were given individual feedback in teacher-student conferences. Checklists were used for self and peer editing. After feedback, the students wrote their final drafts and put them in their portfolios. At the end of the term, they wrote cover letters regarding the questions asked by the teacher.

Throughout the study, the researcher kept a diary and wrote her reflections on what happened in the classroom and the students' reactions towards the implementation of

portfolios. Taking some notes during the class and writing opinions, feelings, and observations on the diary after each class provided a detailed picture at the end of the study. This data enlightened the researcher on the working parts and problematic issues of the use of portfolios at a preparatory school.

The main purpose of the present study was to find out how the use of portfolios can be implemented at a preparatory school. The cycles of the process approach were conducted successfully with pre-writing activities, instant feedback, feedback conferences and checklists. The most difficult part of the three cycles was the pre-writing stage because the students had not had strong schemata for composing essays. Brainstorming and planning stages went well with group and pair activities. Discussions, visual aids, graphic organizers were also encouraging for pre-writing. The students wrote their drafts in the classroom to provide them instant feedback and due to plagiarism issues. They took holistic feedback from the teacher while they were drafting. Since the time of the feedback is an important factor for effective feedback, the students benefited from instant feedback. Teacher-student feedback conference after drafting became the featured and the favorite step of the students. Discussing the errors together made revising and editing easier because unlike error codes, oral feedback was understandable for them and they clearly figured out what they needed to do in order to achieve the goals. The researcher could also follow the students closely and give feedback considering their needs. Self-editing and peer editing were applied towards the end of the term. In terms of the students, it contributed a lot to recognizing their own weaknesses and developing strategies to improve. Peer editing provided them a reader perspective and showed them what they needed to focus on. It also brought the cooperation between the strong and weak students. Writing final drafts with correcting errors was the final step of displaying their performance in learning to write.

Keeping portfolios supplied a number of advantages for students. First of all, by asking them to write step by step and showing their growth, portfolios motivated students to write and they became self-confident. Additionally, producing more than one draft made contribution to learning the language. Drafts and feedbacks gave the students the opportunity to take risks with the use of language and they learnt a lot from their errors. Thirdly, with the assistance of a guide rather than a judge, the classes became student-centered. Knowing that they were not graded by just one draft, the students became eager to write and gained some writing habits. Moreover, by looking at their portfolios, they developed their own learning strategies in becoming good writers. The most advantageous side of portfolios was taking individual feedback. The students were able to identify their needs and see how much effort



they should put in to be successful. On the other hand, keeping portfolios requires a great degree of responsibility. Some students suffered from having lost their drafts. For all students, keeping drafts till the end of the term was stressful.

From the teacher's perspective, portfolios were beneficial in some regards. The teacher gained the opportunity to evaluate each student's performance through the term. Hence, the teacher, acting as a coach, became more effective in constructing writing behaviors in her students. However, it sometimes became very exhausting to read and discuss the drafts of all the students in a limited time. On the other hand, it was valuable to see the results of the instruction as an improvement reflected in the portfolios. They became a great and valuable source of motivation for the teacher.

Cover letters supplied the data to accomplish the second purpose of the study. The study also aimed to find out whether the use of portfolio helps preparatory school students in becoming aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Students reflected on their portfolios and stated that they have some weakness like writing a good introduction paragraph and well-supported body paragraphs. They also liked the topics that appealed to their interests most and in those cases wrote their best essays. Although they did not like their first essays in comparison to their last compositions, they realized that they were not as skilled in the beginning of the term and that by the conclusion of the course did not make as many mistakes as they had done in their earlier compositions. With the help of transitions, they agreed that they had become better at organizing and connecting ideas.

## **5.2. Implications and suggestions for further studies**

Because of the benefits for the teacher and the students and positive reactions of the students towards portfolios, I recommend that the use of portfolios can be integrated to the curriculum as a self-assessment tool. However, it requires systematic and careful preparation to integrate portfolios into the curriculum. When students and teachers receive training for the use of portfolios as a self-assessment tool, portfolios may yield beneficial results for learners and teachers.

Portfolios can be used in writing classes in order to promote autonomous learning at Zirve University Preparatory School. By being able to judge their weaknesses and strengths, students can take the responsibility for their learning and develop their own learning strategies related to their needs. This might also change their perceptions of learning to write. Portfolios give the opportunity to compare drafts and see growth throughout the instruction. Thus,

portfolios may increase the intrinsic motivation of students. Besides, students can develop a critical eye to writing as the results of self-editing and peer editing activities.

Portfolios may be useful in adopting effective writing behaviors and habits. Students can practice the universal stages of writing and develop their individual processes. When teachers act like coaches in a workshop environment, students can improve their writing skill as much as they perform. Teachers can also evaluate their instruction by observing and reflecting on portfolios. Being aware of the strengths and weaknesses, teachers can be more effective in the learning process. Moreover, since the communication between students and teachers is promoted by feedback conferences, teachers can become more encouraging and supportive in the class.

For further studies, it can be suggested that this study be conducted for all levels to see and compare the effects in different levels. Another study might include more than one teacher in order to get a wider perspective in using portfolios. Reflections of several teachers can provide more data and reveal issues that were not encountered in this study. In another study, it can be investigated if the use of portfolios affects students' performance in the exams and if there is a relation between students' test scores and their portfolio performance.

Portfolios can be used as an alternative assessment tool in another study. Portfolio-based assessment may be implemented at Preparatory School of Zirve University and the perceptions of students towards portfolio assessment can be investigated. The attitudes of students towards being assessed on merely one draft versus being graded on portfolios can be compared. The effects of portfolio as an alternative assessment tool on students' motivation can also be researched.

The use of portfolios may also be studied in terms of teacher development. A study can be conducted to find out teachers' perceptions towards using portfolios in the classroom and its effects and reflection on their instruction. Moreover, by implementing the portfolio in the Preparatory School, the perceptions of administrators' can be found out. Integrating portfolio assessment to the grading system may be discussed with administration. Hence, an individual portfolio system could be developed in another study regarding the goals, objectives and needs of the school.

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