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THE EFFECT OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO ON SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING SKILLS*

*Muzaffer BARIN** - Aysel EYERCİ****

ABSTRACT

Writing is accepted as one of the most significant skills of language and communication. However the development, teaching and assessment of writing is also rather difficult for learners and teachers. The present study aims to investigate the effect of European Language Portfolio (ELP), which the Council of Europe put forward as an alternative language learning and assessment tool, on second language writing skills. The study was conducted with two hundred participants in a process oriented writing class in a private language school both quantitatively and qualitatively. During the study the ELP was used as the methodological framework of the study. According to the aim of the study, the program that the participants would cover during the study was firstly determined and the ELP was used in English lesson without disrupting the program. Throughout the study, the students' use of the ELP in the lessons, their attitudes towards the method, their participation to the lessons were observed and a questionnaire, field notes, students' portfolios and interviews were used as data collection tool. In addition, focus group interview provided data for the qualitative investigation of the research questions. According to the analysis of the data, it was found out that the ELP was effective in improving writing skills of second language learners. İmplications for pedagogy have been suggested for learners and teachers. This study is expected to shed light on further studies which can benefit from various research methods and designs.

* This study is based on the researcher's MA thesis.

** Asst. Prof. Dr., Atatürk University, El-mek:barin@atauni.edu.tr

*** Instr., Atatürk University, El-mek: ayselcatal@atauni.edu.tr

STRUCTURED ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate the effect of European Language Portfolio (ELP), which the Council of Europe put forward as an alternative language learning and assessment tool, on second language writing skills. The ELP is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe 1998; 2001, Mirici, 2008).

The study was conducted with two hundred participants in a process oriented writing class in a private language school both quantitatively and qualitatively. Throughout this study, it was revealed whether learners improved their writing skills in the target language when they used the ELP at their writing classes. Furthermore, the study also aimed to understand the attitudes and beliefs of learners towards portfolio assessment and keeping portfolio as an alternative way of assessment. It also provided an insight about the perceptions of EFL students towards the use of portfolios. Therefore, the aim of this study was to find answers to the following research questions: Is European Language Portfolio an effective instrument on teaching writing skills in foreign language classrooms? And is there any significant improvement in students in terms of writing skills after implementing ELP?

During the study the ELP was used as the methodological framework of the study. According to the aim of the study, the program that the participants would cover during the study was firstly determined and the ELP was used in English lesson without disrupting the program.

Throughout the study, the students' use of the ELP in the lessons, their attitudes towards the method, their participation to the lessons were observed and a questionnaire, field notes, students' portfolios and interviews were used as data collection tool. In addition, focus group interview provided data for the qualitative investigation of the research questions.

The other main data collection tools we used in this study were the students' portfolios, namely, the European Language Portfolio, which include the full of the learners' own studies, checklists, and reflections.

In this study, we also used a standardized open-ended focus group interview so as to find answers to the research questions (See Appendix V). The interview was conducted to ten participants chosen by randomly among the whole class (200 students) in which the ELP was implemented. We hoped to have an insight about the participants' understanding of writing portfolio technique, and to learn the participants' opinions in terms of the use of writing portfolio and its effect on their writing skills.

When it comes to the conclusions of the current study it can be said that in relation to the first research question worded as 'Is European Language Portfolio an effective instrument on teaching writing skills in foreign language classrooms?' the questionnaire revealed that at the end of the study, 77 % of the participants gave positive responses to the questions, while 8,5% of them gave negative responses by putting x in 'never' option and 18,5% of them claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item, which verified that those participants were not confident of

themselves in total.' Is there any significant improvement in students in terms of writing skills after implementing ELP?' the study showed that writing portfolio was a very effective tool for improving writing skills based on the statistically significant results. This result was consistent with the result of some studies mentioned in the literature (Sağlam, 2005). In addition; the effect of writing portfolio on the participants' writing skills was qualitatively documented by means of dossier work of them, and focus group interview. The participants stated that writing portfolio enabled them to improve their writing skills such as language use (grammar, sentence structure and written expression), vocabulary and organizing ideas. The study showed that most of the participants developed positive opinions regarding the use of writing portfolios for improving writing skills. They realized the usefulness and necessity of writing portfolios for improving writing skills and reported that keeping a writing portfolio was a must for improving writing skills. Writing portfolio gave the teacher-researcher the opportunity to learn about her students' knowledge, skills, interests, emotions and opinions as it is stated by Nunes (2004). Through portfolio, instruction and assessment were combined, as it is maintained by Paulson et al. (1991).

In terms of English language teaching practice, the study has the following implications: keeping portfolio is a very effective technique in teaching writing, especially for an EFL context like Turkey and it is hoped that this study will inspire researchers to do more research on the possible effects of language class portfolios as a tool on writing skills and the other skills and dynamics of language learning.

Keywords: Portfolio, The European Language Portfolio, Second Language Writing Skills, Process Writing

AVRUPA DİL PORTFOLYOSUNUN YABANCI DİLDE YAZMA BECERİSNE ETKİSİ

ÖZET

Yazma becerisi yabancı dilde dört temel dil becerisi arasında öğrenciler için en zor ve zahmetli beceri olarak değerlendirilir. Bu becerinin geliştirilmesi, edinilmesi ve değerlendirilmesi amacıyla pek çok araştırma ve inceleme yapılmıştır. Avrupa Dil Portfolyosu da yazma becerisinin denetimi için belirli ölçütler ve basamaklar belirlemiş, öğrencilerin hangi düzeyde olduklarının belirlenmesini ve bu becerinin nasıl geliştirilebileceğini gösteren somut veriler sağlamıştır. Bu çalışma, Avrupa Konseyi tarafından alternatif bir öğrenme ve değerlendirme aracı olarak ortaya koyduğu Avrupa Dil Portfolyosunun (ELP) ikinci dilde yazma becerisine etkisini araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışma, süreç odaklı bir yazma sınıfında 200 katılımcıyla biz özel dil okulunda nitel ve nicel olarak gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışma boyunca ELP, yöntemsel çerçeve olarak kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın amacına göre, katılımcıların yer alacağı program belirlenmiş ve ELP, programda değişiklik yapılmadan kullanılmıştır. Çalışma boyunca, öğrencilerin derslerde ELP kullanımları, yönteme yönelik tutumları ve derslere katılımları gözlemlenmiş ve anket, alan notları, öğrenci portfolyoları ve röportajlar very toplama araçları olarak kullanılmışlardır. Ayrıca, odak grup görüşmesiyle de nitel boyutta

very elde edilmiştir. Veri analizlerine göre ELP'nin yabancı dil öğrencilerinin yazma becerilerini geliştirdiği belirlenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları ortaya konuşmuş ve hem yabancı dil öğrencilerine hem de öğretmenlere uygulamaya yönelik öneriler sunulmuştur. Bu çalışmanın daha geniş ve kapsamlı örneklemle yinelenmesi, farklı araştırma yöntemleriyle desteklenmesi gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalara yol gösterecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: portfolyo, Avrupa Dil Portfolyosu, yabancı dilde yazma becerisi, süreç odaklı yazma becerisi.

1. Introduction

1.1. The European Language Portfolio

As communication has gained much importance in today's world, knowing at least one foreign language has become one of the most crucial aims of the foreign language policies of many countries and this has led them to revise their foreign language policies as the commitments of European Union set several paradigms to this end (Akdemir, 2017; İşisağ & Demirel, 2010). Parallel with the aims of those countries, Turkish Republic, which is one of the member states of the Council of Europe (hereafter CoE) since 1949, aligned its educational principles and practices with those of its European counterparts and foreign language education has always been at the core these practices (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2005).

It was 2001 when the Council of Europe developed The European Language Portfolio (ELP) in order to promote plurilingualism and to standardize and harmonize foreign language teaching activities among people of Europe whose languages and cultural backgrounds were different. Before launching it in 2001, which was planned to be the European Year of Languages, the Council of Europe had some piloting projects covering all educational levels – from primary school to university, in fifteen member states of the Council of Europe between 1998-2000 (Little, 2002).

Yağiz, Aydin and Akdemir (2016) indicate "Given the global importance and dominance of English in both scientific and educational domains, Turkey, currently as an EU candidate, has not refrained herself from international integration in many fields including science, education and research". Just after ELP was launched, the CoE Language Portfolio Special Expertise Commission was formed and Turkey took part in the piloting phase of the European Language Portfolio and after the piloting phase, the Ministry of Turkish National Education decided to officially launch the European Language Portfolio in the academic year of 2009-2010. A sample ELP model for high school students was developed the Turkish ELP project committee just before Turkish version of the ELP was launched and it was published under the name "European Language Portfolio "Avrupa Dil Gelisim Dosyası" (Egel, 2009). After some models were piloted, the final versions for Turkish ELP models were developed for 10-14 and 15-18 years of age groups (Mirici&Kavaklı, 2017).

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) constitutes the basis of the ELP and it has a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe (Council of Europe, 2001, 2002, 2006, 2007; Mirici, 2008). The CEFR describes foreign language proficiency levels as A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. Each level has verbal descriptors in the form of can-do statements relating to five language skill areas; listening, reading, spoken interaction, spoken production and writing (Mirici, 2000; North, 2000; Little, 2005).

Scharer describes the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as follows (2000):

The ELP is a type of document that the Council of Europe (CoE) has formed for those who are learning or have learned a language in formal or informal settings, to be able to record and reflect on their language learning and cultural experiences. The ELP "is a personal tool for all Europeans to develop into plurilingual and inter-culturally competent citizens.

1.2. L2 Writing and Portfolio Assessment

Akdemir and Eyerci (2016) state, "As being one of the crucial productive skills, writing in a second language has a key role in individuals' professional lives regarding the challenges of contemporary professional and academic life. It is possibleto say that writing must be developed as a skill or a habit but sometimes it may be too late for second language learners. It is undoubtedly a great challenge to select the best approaches, methods and techniques to be used in EFL classes". Being one of the four main skills and a productive one along with speaking, writing in second language as a discipline lacked a comprehensive theory until the early 1990s, however it has been individually a field of inquiry and research for almost three decades (Silva, 1993, p.668).

L2 writing research is considered as a critical area of inquiry in L2 learning and teaching (Hinkel, 2005, p.598). L2 Writing research and pedagogy has shed on light the complexity of L2 writing processes with extensive in-depth research on writers, their strategies and perceptions towards L2 writing in recent decades. Göksoy and Keşli Dollar (2017) maintain, "Considering foreign language learning in a formal setting it can be seen that writing and reading are the main skills through which language acquisition is taking place ".

According to Alkan and Kartal (2018), "Neighbouring Middle East and Europe, Turkey formally applied for membership of European Union in 1987. Negotiations began in 2005. Since then, a variety of reforms have undergone in Turkey, including education. Two of these reforms were made in 2005 and 2013. The main idea of these reforms was to implement Constructivism as the basic philosophy in curriculums ". In the light of the theory of constructivism, the assessment processes of learning settings has been shifted from the traditional procedures to alternative ones. In 1980s, the term alternative assessment appeared under different names such as authentic assessment, performance assessment and portfolios (Calfee and Perfumo, 1996). The aim of these new types of alternative assessments was to match instruction with assessment. Portfolios let the student collect their writing samples for a period of time in comparison to the direct assessment of writing at a limited short time, and also instruction and assessment can be combined (Murhpy&Smith, 1990). The crucial point that is marked in portfolio assessment is the instruction of writing as a process rather than a product. Portfolios provide students with opportunities to practice actual writing more for meaningful purposes. Peer and teacher feedback, reflection and self-assessment lead students to true and meaningful learning.

Various researchers from all over the world studied the effectiveness, accountability, applicability and limitations of ELP since the introduction of it by the Council of Europe. Erice (2008) attempted to reveal the effects of e-portfolio on the writing skills of foreign language learners and concludes that e-portfolio could be an effective tool for supporting learning to improve writing skills.

Öztürk (2010) tried to reveal the effect of writing portfolios on the writing skills of the tenth grade Turkish EFL students and shares her findings by expressing that writing portfolio gave the teacher-researcher the opportunity to learn about her students' knowledge, skills, interests, emotions and opinions, through portfolio, instruction and assessment were combined. This study concluded that students not only improved their writing skills in English but also assessed themselves.

In another article Duong, Cuc and Griffin (2011), titled as "Developing a Framework to Measure a Process-Oriented Writing Competence: A Case of Vietnamese EFL Students' Formal

Portfolio Assessment" the researchers suggest that an empirical framework for writing portfolio assessment can be developed from a widely accepted but mainly theoretical literature.

The studies mentioned above inspired the researcher to see the relationship between using ELP and writing skills of foreign language learners. With the extensive use of European Language Portfolio in foreign language setting in Turkey the researchers of this study wanted to reveal the effects and practicability of ELP on EFL writing skills.

1.3. Research Questions

Throughout this study, it will be revealed whether learners improve their writing skills in the target language when they use the ELP at their writing classes. Furthermore, the study also seeks to understand the attitudes and beliefs of learners towards portfolio assessment and keeping portfolio as an alternative way of assessment. It will also provide an insight about the perceptions of EFL students towards the use of portfolios. Therefore, the aim of the current study is to answers the following research questions:

1. Is European Language Portfolio an effective instrument on teaching writing skills in foreign language classrooms?

2. Is there any significant improvement in students in terms of writing skills after implementing ELP?

2. Methodology

A mixed research design was adopted for the purposes of this study with an aim to understand the effects of the ELP on second language writing skills both qualitatively and quantitatively. As Dörnyei (2007) asserted a decade ago mixed methods research has been increasingly thought as the third approach in research methodology and some eminent methodologists in the social sciences affirm to use this design.

We answered the research questions through the questionnaire (See Appendix II). The questionnaire was conducted to all the students in the chosen classes, totally 200 participants after the implementation.

The questionnaire seeks students' answers about of A1 and A2 writing criterion of Swiss ELP version. While preparing the questions, we chose the criterion of Swiss ELP version in this research (See Appendix I). The questionnaire was administered to two hundred students at the end of the study and the software SPSS (16.0) frequency analysis was used for the analysis of the Likert-scale items. Cronbach Alpha was calculated as .87, which can be noted that the questionnaire was a moderately reliable one.

In order to increase the reliability of the study, we adapted a participant as observer method and made classroom observations (See Appendix III). The observer tried to fill in the checklist not to forget what she observed later for the each session during the implementation process of the study.

In the checklist observation date, setting, participants, events, gestures and other important details were filled. In addition, since their importance in terms of providing reflections, ideas and also researcher's own biases (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) we used jotted field-notes, which helped us to take account of not only descriptions but also the feelings, reflections, interpretation of the researchers and analysis of the events.

The other main data collection tools we used in this study were the students' portfolios, namely, the European Language Portfolio, which include the full of the learners' own studies, checklists, and reflections.

In this study, we also used a standardized open-ended focus group interview so as to find answers to the research questions (See Appendix V). The interview was conducted to ten participants chosen by randomly among the whole class (200 students) in which the ELP was implemented. We hoped to have an insight about the participants' understanding of writing portfolio technique, and to learn the participants' opinions in terms of the use of writing portfolio and its effect on their writing skills.

The research was conducted at a private language school in Turkey. The sample of the study consisted of two hundred students of EFL, whose level was basic, namely A1-A2, and they were studying English at that language school at the time of the research.

The analysis techniques of the current study were primarily based on the analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire, interviews, observation, field-notes, and participant's portfolios**.**

3. Results

3.1 Results of the Questionnaire

The findings have been presented under the titles above. The researcher conducted a questionnaire to discover the effect of ELP on second language writing skills, which included 12 questions based on the writing criterion A1 and A2 of Swiss ELP model. The interview searched the students' feeling about the ELP and the effect of it on writing skills. Consequently, the focus in the questionnaire and in the interview was the ELP (See Appendix II for the questionnaire and See Appendix V for the interview).

The questionnaire was administered to two hundred students at the end of the study and the software SPSS (16.0) frequency analysis was used for the analysis of the Likert-scale items. For the analysis of the questionnaire, the scores 1= Never and 2= Rarely were accepted as negative values whereas the scores 4= Often and 5= Always were accepted as positive values and 3= Sometimes was considered neither positive nor negative. Besides, frequencies and arithmetical means of the frequencies for the questions in the same group were computed.

Analysing the questionnaire results was the next step. The frequencies, percentages and the standard deviations for each item of the questionnaire were calculated. Next, the mean percentage for each category was found. The tables of the results were prepared for each question, which were the descriptors and they were derived from the "ELP guide for teacher trainers" of Little and Perclova (2001) and Little (2003). Cronbach Alpha was calculated as .87 .The results were as:

Q1. I can fill in a questionnaire with my personal details (job, age, address, hobbies).

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
10	5.0	33	16.5	38	19.0	31	15.5	88	44.0	3.77	1.30

Table 1. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 1

The first item worded as 'I can fill in a questionnaire with my personal details (job, age, address, hobbies)' showed that 44 % of the participants chose 'always' option. The participants in total gave positive responses as the rate of over 50%. This showed that the participants did not have a difficulty in dealing with the first descriptor. The participants reported their opinion as 'rarely' and

'never' account for the 21.5% of the total of them. However, another finding aroused at the end of analysis was that 38% of the participants claimed their responses as 'sometimes' for this descriptor, which can be regarded as one of the basic writing skills. This rate is far higher than the expected one.

Q 2: I can write a greeting card, for instance a birthday card.

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
6	3.0	3	1.5	23	11.5	54	27.0	114	57.0	4.33	.95

Table 2. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 2

The second item worded as 'I can write a greeting card, for instance a birthday card' showed that 57 % of the participants chose 'always' option. The participants in total gave positive responses as the rate of over 84%. On the other hand 4.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 38% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for this descriptor. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses; this essentially means that participants did not have a challenge with this descriptor.

Q3: I can write a simple postcard (for example with holiday greetings)

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	.5	6	3.0	26	13.0	37	18.5	130	65.0	4.44	.87

Table 3. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 3

The third item worded as 'I can write a simple postcard (for example with holiday greetings)' showed that 83.5 % of the participants, 167 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 3.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 13% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses; this essentially means that participants did not have a challenge with this descriptor.

Q 4: I can write sentences and simple phrases about myself, for example where I live and what I do.

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
8	4.0	8	4.0	42	21.0	53	26.5	89	44.5	4.03	1.08

Table 4. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 4

The fourth item worded as 'I can write sentences and simple phrases about me, for example where I live and what I do' showed that 70 % of the participants gave positive responses; this rate

verified that more than half of the participants were able to fulfil this descriptor. On the other hand, 8% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, However, another finding aroused at the end of analysis was that 42% of the participants, namely 42 students, claimed their responses as 'sometimes' for this descriptor which can be regarded as one of the basic writing skills. This rate is far higher than the expected one

Q 5: I can write short, simple notes and messages.

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
5	2.5	15	7.5	35	17.5	53	26.5	92	46.0	4.06	1.07

Table 5. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 5

The fifth item worded as 'I can write short, simple notes and messages.' showed that 72.5 % of the participants, namely 145 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 10% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 17.5% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses; this essentially means that participants did not have a challenge with this descriptor.

Q 6: I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident)

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
6	3.0	15	7.5	35	17.5	54	27.0	90	45.0	4.03	1.09

Table 6. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 6

The sixth item worded as 'I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident)' showed that 72 % of the participants, that is 144 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 10.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 17.5 % of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses; this essentially means that participants did not have a challenge with this descriptor.

Q 7: I can write about aspects of my everyday life in simple phrases and sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies).

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
5	2.5	7	3.5	17	8.5	44	22.0	127	63.5	4.40	.96

Table 7. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 7

The seventh item worded as 'I can write about aspects of my everyday life in simple phrases and sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies)' showed that 85.5 % of the participants, namely 171 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 6 % of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 8.5% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses; this essentially means that participants did not have a challenge with this descriptor.

Q 8: I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills.

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	.5	6	3.0	16	8.0	44	22.0	133	66.5	4.51	.81

Table 8. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 8

The eighth item worded as 'I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills' showed that 88.5 % of the participants gave positive responses; on the other hand, 3.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 8 % of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item, in other words they were not confident of themselves. One point that should be taken into account related to this item was that it was the question got the highest positive responses of all. Thus, it is quite obvious that students felt themselves confident to fulfil this descriptor.

Q 9: I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies).

1		2		3		4		5		$\overline{X}$	S
f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
4	2.0	12	6.0	22	11.0	38	19.0	124	62.0	4.33	1.02

Table 9. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 9

The ninth item worded as 'I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies)' showed that 81 % of the participants, namely 162 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 8 % of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 11% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. It is worth considering about the rates of the negative and neutral responses as well.

Q 10: I can write a short letter using simple expressions for greeting, addressing, asking or thanking somebody.

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
3	1.5	11	5.5	22	11.0	37	18.5	127	63.5	4.37	.98

Table 10. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 10

The tenth item worded as 'I can write a short letter using simple expressions for greeting, addressing, asking or thanking somebody' showed that 82 % of the participants, that is 164 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 6.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 11% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. Considering the standard mean of this item, the ones giving positive responses account for the great many of the total responses, this rate is far higher than the expected one.

Q 11: I can write simple sentences, connecting them with words such as "and", "but", "because".

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
14	7.0	15	7.5	22	11.0	34	17.0	115	57.5	4.10	1.27

Table 11. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 11

The eleventh item worded as 'I can write simple sentences, connecting them with words such as "and", "but", "because" ' showed that 74.5 % of the participants, namely 149 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 14.5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 11% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item. It is worth considering about the rates of the negative and neutral responses as well.

Q 12: I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later).

1		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		$\overline{X}$	**S**
f	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**	**f**	**%**		
2	1.0	8	4.0	22	11.0	36	18.0	132	66.0	4.44	.91

Table 12. The percentage, frequency, arithmetical mean and the standard deviation for item 12

The twelfth item worded as 'I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later)' showed that 84 % of the participants, that is 168 students, gave positive responses; on the other hand, 5% of the participants gave negative responses for this descriptor, 11% of the participants claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item, which verified that those participants were not confident of themselves. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were at the rates, which verify this data.

3.2. Results of the Focus Group Interviews

At the end of the study, a focus group interview was carried out with ten students. The aim was have an insight about the participants' understanding of writing portfolio technique, and to learn the participants' opinions regarding the use of writing portfolio for improving writing skills and its effect on their writing skills.

The interview was a semi structured one and designed in a way that 50 % of the male and female participants could be represented. Six questions prepared beforehand (see Appendix V for the questions) were asked at the interview. Some additional questions were asked in reaction to the interviewees' responses to the question four. The results by questions were presented below. Analysis of the first item worded as 'What topics do you like writing about?' showed that 9 participants liked writing about themselves on the topics such as their hobbies and families while only one of them reported that he liked writing about famous people. The result confirmed the data gathered through the questionnaire. The second question was about the weaknesses of the participants in writing in English at the beginning of the study. 9 of the interviewees reported that language use was the major problem for them, which were mainly insufficient grammar knowledge and insufficient vocabulary. In response to the third question worded as 'Did writing portfolio help you to improve your weaknesses in writing in English? How?' all the interviewees stated:

"Yes, it was so useful in terms of improving our weaknesses in writing in English."

And they elucidated their opinions as in the following quotations:

____*"I learned new phrases to use in writing."*

____*" I learned how to make good sentences. Now I can make longer sentences."*

____*"I have improved my grammar and vocabulary"*

____*"I noticed my grammatical mistakes, even my punctuation. Using portfolio helps me to see my mistakes and gives me chance to correct them by preparing drafts and keeping them in my dossier.*

The interviewees' responses to the fourth question worded as 'In your opinion, what is a writing portfolio? What did you do with your teacher while you were keeping your writing portfolio?' caused the researcher to ask some additional questions in reaction to the participants' responses. Thus, the analysis of the responses showed that none of the interviewees had kept a writing portfolio before in addition they did not get any feedback from their teachers or peers and did nit prepare any drafts beforehand.

In response to the fifth question worded as 'What difficulties did you have while you were keeping your writing portfolio?' all the interviewees reported that finding ideas, making sentences and finding the right words and using a wide range of words were the difficulties they experienced while they were keeping their portfolios.

In response to the sixth item worded as 'Do you think that it is a must to keep a writing portfolio for improving writing skills in English?" Why / Why not?' all of the interviewees stated:

____*"Yes, it is a very good idea keep a writing portfolio for improving writing skills in English".*

And they explained their reasons as in the following quotations:

_____"*because we not only corrected our mistakes but also learned new things while writing the tasks in draft forms."*

____*"because writing portfolio helped us to practise writing in English."*

____*"because taking teacher feedback and peer feedback helped us to notice our mistakes".*

We can conclude that the students have positive evaluations about using the portfolio and the ELP improves the students' learning with real-life exercises.

4. Conclusions and Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate two research questions; namely, a) Is European Language Portfolio an effective instrument on teaching writing skills in foreign language classrooms? b) Is there any significant improvement in students in terms of writing skills after implementing ELP?

In relation to the first research question worded as 'Is European Language Portfolio an effective instrument on teaching writing skills in foreign language classrooms?' questionnaire revealed that at the end of the study, 77 % of the participants gave positive responses to the questions, while 8,5% of them gave negative responses by putting x in 'never' option and 18,5% of them claimed their responses a 'sometimes' for the item, which verified that those participants were not confident of themselves in total.

'Is there any significant improvement in students in terms of writing skills after implementing ELP?' the study showed that writing portfolio was a very effective tool for improving writing skills based on the statistically significant results This result was consistent with the result of some studies mentioned in the literature (Sağlam, 2005). In addition; the effect of writing portfolio on the participants' writing skills was qualitatively documented by means of dossier work of them, and focus group interview. The participants stated that writing portfolio enabled them to improve their writing skills such as language use (grammar, sentence structure and written expression), vocabulary and organizing ideas. The study showed that most of the participants developed positive opinions regarding the use of writing portfolios for improving writing skills. They realized the usefulness and necessity of writing portfolios for improving writing skills and reported that keeping a writing portfolio was a must for improving writing skills. Writing portfolio gave the teacher-researcher the opportunity to learn about her students' knowledge, skills, interests, emotions and opinions as it is stated by Nunes (2004). Through portfolio, instruction and assessment were combined, as it is maintained by Paulson et al. (1991). The results of this study were compatible with the results of the study of Nezakatgoo (2011), in which the researcher came to a conclusion that the portfolio assessment should be preferred as an alternative assessment tool when teaching writing as a second language.

In terms of English language teaching practice, the study has the following implications: First, keeping portfolio is a very effective technique in teaching writing, especially for an EFL context like Turkey.

There is little writing portfolio and language class portfolio research at both state and private schools in Turkey and it is hoped that this study will inspire researchers to do more research on the possible effects of language class portfolios as a tool on writing skills and the other skills and dynamics of language learning.

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APPENDIX I

THE CEFR, THE SWISS MODEL.



		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING	Listening	I can understand familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g., very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programmes on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programmes. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programmes and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialised articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
SPEAKING	Spoken Interaction	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g., family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
WRITING	Writing	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select a style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.

APPENDIX II

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EUROPEAN LANGUAGE PORTFOLIO STUDY

Following are a number of statements with which some people agree and others disagree. I would like you to indicate your opinion after each statement by putting an 'X' in the box that best indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Please put ONLY ONE 'X' after each statement. Thank you very much for your help.

	Always	**Often**	**Sometimes**	**Rarely**	**Never**
I can fill in a questionnaire with my personal details (job, age, address, hobbies).					
I can write a greeting card, for instance a birthday card.					
I can write a simple postcard (for example with holiday greetings).					
I can write sentences and simple phrases about myself, for example where I live and what I do.					
I can write short, simple notes and messages.					
I can describe an event in simple sentences and report what happened when and where (for example a party or an accident)					
I can write about aspects of my everyday life in simple phrases and sentences (people, places, job, school, family, hobbies).					
I can fill in a questionnaire giving an account of my educational background, my job, my interests and my specific skills.					
I can briefly introduce myself in a letter with simple phrases and sentences (family, school, job, hobbies).					
I can write a short letter using simple expressions for greeting, addressing, asking or thanking somebody.					
I can write simple sentences, connecting them with words such as "and", "but", "because".					
I can use the most important connecting words to indicate the chronological order of events (first, then, after, later).					

This is the end of the questionnaire.

Thank you!

APPENDIX III

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

DATE	SETTING	PARTICIPANTS	EVENTS	NOTES

APPENDIX IV

FIELD-NOTES FORM

DATE	NOTES	REFLECTION

APPENDIX V

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What topics do you like writing about?
2. What were your weaknesses in writing in English before the study?
3. Did writing portfolio help you to improve your weaknesses in writing in English? How?
4. In your opinion, what is a writing portfolio? What did you do with your teacher while you were keeping your writing portfolio?

a) Had you ever kept a writing portfolio before the study?

b) How often did you write compositions in English before the study?

c) Before this study, had you ever written your tasks in English in drafts receiving peer and teacher feedback between them?

5. What difficulties did you have while you were keeping your writing portfolio?
6. Do you think that it is a must to keep a writing portfolio for improving writing skills in English?" Why / Why not?