

The Effect of Portfolio Assessment on Goal-orientation of Iranian Male and Female EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of Iranian male and female EFL learners. 29 upper-intermediate EFL learners learning English at Chitsazan Language Institute, in Tabriz, were selected for the purpose of study. The participants were from a male intact class (N=16) and a female intact class (N=13). Both groups were tested based on TOEFL test to ensure the homogeneity in terms of general language proficiency. Besides, Midgley and Colleagues' (1998) goal-orientation questionnaire was administered as the pre-test to estimate prior goal-orientation level of both groups. To match this questionnaire to the needs and context of this study, the researchers adopted the 18 item questionnaire to writing assignment. Later on, during 8 sessions, the researcher carried out portfolio assessment with a focus on writing assignments. The seven steps of portfolio assessment proposed by Delett's et al (2001) were opted for as a framework for portfolio evaluation. After the finalizing the assessment sessions, the participants performed the same questionnaire as the pos-test. The data were analyzed using a One-way ANCOVA test. The findings of the study revealed that there was a significant difference in mean goal-orientation $F(27)=6.40$, $p=0.018$ between the two groups. Moreover, comparing the estimated marginal means showed that the most progress in goal-orientation was for females (mean=76.124) compared to male participants (mean=65.274). The research findings have several implications for language learners and teachers.

Keywords: portfolio assessment, goal-orientation, gender, Iranian EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

In the late 1900s, the idea of goal orientation was proposed by Dweck and Elliot (1983). They believed that goal orientation generally aimed at natural goal preferences that a person implicitly arranges for oneself to do a task. Pintrich (2000, p.93) defines goal orientations as "...constructs that address the issue of the purpose or reason why students are pursuing an achievement task". This definition was later modified by Was

(2006) who claimed that goal orientation theory refers to the students' different orientations toward certain types of goals (Was, 2006). Dweck and Leggett (1988) assume that goals provide a framework with which individuals can interpret the events and react to them. They also claim that goals can result in different patterns of cognition, affect, and behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). These certain goals can refer to situation-specific beliefs, reasons, and the purposes that lead learners to approach and engage in the learning tasks (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1986).

Generally, learners can be divided into two groups based in their orientation: learning or mastery oriented learners or performance oriented learners. According to Button, Mathieu, and Zajac (1996), language *learning orientation* is seen as the desire to gain first-hand, detailed knowledge of a given task or matter. In contrast, *performance orientation* is the aspiration to display a person's capability on a definite matter or assignment. Payne, Youngcourt, and Beaubien (2007) claim that people with learning goal orientation are more willing to look for feedback; however, people with performance approach orientation only look for feedback if they understand that the feedback will be positive and fruitful.

These goal orientations, whether learning or performance, reflect the goals students pursue when learning. When students pursue performance goals, their concern is to be judged capable, to compare favorably to others, to prove ability by outperforming others, to establish one's place in a hierarchy, to obtain good judgments about their competence, or to avoid negative ones (Covington, 2000; Dweck, 1986; Maehr & Midgley, 1996; Zimmerman, 1994). Goal setting in language learning is commonly considered as one of the methods that encourages learner autonomy which is considered as a type of strategy (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981; Wentzel, 1991; Yang, 1998). Learners with goal-orientation strategy will be willing to be engaged in the activities and they will be capable of concentrating their progressive stages to assign previously assigned outcomes (Ames, 1992). According to Pintrich (2000), goal-oriented learners are mostly concerned with the outcomes of the learning process. They also focus on the aims of learning through continuing their assigned task. Regarding the advantages of goal-orientation, Shih (2005) pointed out that students who adopted goal-oriented beliefs benefited from their cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

In the language learning context especially in EFL classrooms, all the students with different goal-oriented beliefs are daily exposed to a variety of assessment activities including alternative assessment. Alternative assessment or as it is claimed by Brown (2004) 'alternatives in assessment' is an alternative to the traditional and standardized testing. Alternative assessment is usually compared with traditional assessment (Brown & Hudson, 1998). As stated by Herman, Aschbacher, and Winters, (1992), alternative assessment can be interchangeably used with some similar terms (for instance, authentic assessment, and performance-based assessment). Bryant and Timmins (2002) believe that alternative assessment is intended to distinguish this form of assessment from traditional, fact-based and multiple choice testing. Herman and colleagues (1992) give a more extended role to alternative assessment and claim that alternative assessment is a blanket term that covers any number of alternatives to standardized tests.

Alternative assessment is beneficial and has a number of positive characteristics (Brown & Hudson, 1998). According to Brown and Hudson (1998), alternative assessment is positive since it requires students to perform, create, produce, or do something; use real-world contexts or simulations; are nonintrusive in that they extend the day-to-day classroom activities; allow students to be assessed on what they normally do in class every day; use tasks that represent meaningful instructional activities; focus on processes as well as products; tap into higher level thinking and problem-solving skills; provide information about both the strengths and weaknesses of students; are multiculturally sensitive when properly administered; ensure that people, not machines, do the scoring, using human judgment; encourage open disclosure of standards and rating criteria; and call upon teachers to perform new instructional and assessment roles (Brown & Hudson, 1998). One of the main reasons that every teacher should use alternative assessment in the classroom is that they all can adopt the tests and assessment techniques to their students.

Garfield (1994, cited in Ebrahimzadeh & Khodareza, 2016) categorizes alternative assessment into three major classes: performance assessment, authentic assessment, and portfolio assessment. One of the popular alternative assessment techniques is the use of portfolios. Ebrahimzadeh and Khodareza (2016) claim that portfolio assessment is the collection and evaluation of a carefully chosen selection of students' work. They assert that the number and types of selections included in a portfolio may vary, but are typically agreed upon by the teacher and student for the purpose of representing what that student has learned. Genesee and Upshur (1996) define a portfolio as a "purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates to students and others their efforts, progress, and achievements in a given area (p. 99)." Also, Mousavi (1999) defines portfolio assessment as "a qualitative approach to program evaluation which calls for the cooperative maintaining of a set of files on the instructional program" (p. 276). The use of portfolios is not new; that is they have a long history. Portfolios are often described as authentic tools of assessment while compared with the traditional classroom test. Rather than showing that the learner knows what has been taught, the portfolio demonstrates that the student can do what has been taught (Damiani, 2004). The scope of the application of portfolio is wide. It can be specific to a particular discipline, or portfolio can very broadly encompass a person's lifelong learning (Butler, 2006). Whatever the scope of portfolio assessment, it can be advantageous to the learners who engage in portfolio assessment (Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Wright, 2002; Brown, 2004).

The effectiveness of Portfolio assessment on different aspects of language has been studied largely during recent years. The wide range of studies focused on four language skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening (Goctu, 2016; Ebrahimzadeh & Khodareza, 2016; Haung, 2012; Moeller, 1994; Mohammad & Abdel-hack, 2011; Ozdemir-cagatay, 2012; Yaghoubi & Mobin, 2015). Huang (2012) examined the implementation of portfolio assessment in integrated English course and concluded that students have positive attitude toward the use of the portfolio assessment. Moreover, the portfolio assessment developed students' language competence, enhanced their cross-cultural knowledge and promoted their learning autonomy and motivation (Huang,

2012). Besides, Ozdemir-cagatay (2012) studied the use of speaking portfolios and concluded that all stakeholders have positive attitudes to the implementation of portfolios in general. In particular, they claimed that an improvement in the students' oral skills and self-reflection skills has been noted to be fostered through the use of the speaking portfolios. More specifically Mohammed and Abdel-Hack (2011) investigated the effectiveness of portfolio assessment approach in developing EFL creative writing. For this purpose, they selected two groups and examined portfolio assessment approach with the experimental group. The results revealed that portfolio assessment has a positive effect in developing creative writing (Mohammed & Abdel-Hack, 2011). However, not all studies show a positive effect of portfolio assessment on learners' language performance. As an instance, Ebrahimzadeh and Khodareza's (2016) research did not confirm the effectiveness of portfolio assessment. In their study, they adopted the quasi-experimental design comprising the pretest-treatment-posttest paradigm and chose two classes with 52 female students. The two classes were completely similar except for integrating portfolio into learning for the experimental group. The result of their study indicated that portfolio assessment did not have a significant effect on the students' reading skill.

Also, portfolio's effect was examined in relation to factors other than language skills. For example, Huang and colleague used goal orientation theory to investigate the relationship between goal orientations, metacognitive strategies, and enjoyment when students use e-Portfolio. A positive effect of students' mastery goals for using e-Portfolio on their metacognitive strategies and enjoyment has been reported. It was believed that performance-approach goals have a negative effect on metacognitive strategies and they have a positive effect on enjoyment. Moreover, performance-avoidance goals have a positive effect on metacognitive strategies. Further, Baleghizadeh and Masum (2014) scrutinized the effect of self-assessment on a group of English-as-a-foreign-language students' goal orientation. The findings also revealed that the students in the experimental group showed significant improvements in learning goal orientation. Baleghizadeh and Masum (2014) suggested that practicing self-assessment on a formative basis boosts EFL students' leaning goal orientation.

Also goal-orientation has been the focus of many researchers in the realm of language teaching and learning. In 2007 Mirhassani, Akbari and Dehghan studied the relationship between Iranian EFL learners' goal-orientated and self-regulated learning and their language proficiency. The results showed that goal-orientation played a significant role in learners' language proficiency. Sadeghy and Mansuri (2014) investigated the relationship between learners' goal-orientation, self-regulated learning and the use of different language learning strategies. The results showed a significant relationship between goal-orientation and language learning strategies, and between mastery, performance goal-orientation and language learning strategies. Besides, Zarei and Gilanian (2014) investigated language learning strategies as predictors of goal-orientation. The results showed significant relationships between language learning strategies and cognitive self-regulated learning components. In addition, they concluded that the only predictor of extrinsic goal-orientation was affective strategies.

Brown (2004) suggests that aspect of portfolio assessment which individualizes learning and celebrates the uniqueness of each student. This characteristic of portfolio assessment can be at the service of goal-orientation. In other words, portfolio assessment can help learners in better selection of their purposes for learning. The major goal of the present study is to investigate the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of Iranian male and female EFL learners. This study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, since the practice of conducting language courses is done in segregated language classrooms, no single method can be used with distinct people with different characteristics and genders. According to Kaplan (1999), language joins on the scene with clear distinctions of use across genders. Thus, it is important to consider the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation across genders. Secondly, as test administration is an inseparable aspect of language learning context, research on portfolio assessment would provide valuable information. Just as Desheng and Varghese (2013) assume testing is an integral part of teaching because it provides significant information or inputs about the growth and achievement of learner's difficulties, styles of learning, and anxiety levels. As stated by Baron and Boschee (1995), the overall purposes of portfolios are to allow students to display their works representing their interests and abilities and to document of their performances. In Iran where English is learnt as a foreign language in the classroom context, the use of portfolios as a unique type of assessment is essential in the classroom; then carrying out this research will be helpful to Iranian learners and teachers. Finally, as Zarei and Usefli (2015) claim in a rather new research, several studies have been done on various aspects of assessment as well as the effect of assessment type on different aspects of language learning; however, there appears to be a paucity of research on the effect of the type of assessment on students' feelings of goal-orientation. Thus, this study which examines the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of Iranian EFL learners might be helpful to the EFL context. For the purpose of the study the following research question and hypotheses are proposed:

- Does portfolio assessment affect goal-orientation of Iranian EFL learners across gender?
- H1: Portfolio assessment has a statistically significant effect on goal-orientation of Iranian EFL learners.
- H2: Portfolio assessment has a statistically significant effect on goal-orientation of Iranian EFL learners across gender.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The study was conducted using a quasi-experimental design in which there were two groups including female group and male group.

Participants

The participants of this study were 29 Iranian EFL learners learning English in Chitsazan Language Institute. They were all from two intact classes which were assigned to female group and male group. The male group consists of 16 upper-intermediate EFL learners with the age range of 19-37; likewise, the female participants were 13 upper-

intermediate learners with the age range of 16- 40. To reduce the possible effect of proficiency level variation as a confounding variable, the initial homogeneity of the groups were tested using TOEFL grammar test including writing assessment. The homogeneity test's data was analyzed using a statistical analysis test with a focus on the comparison of the means of the two separate and independent groups; i.e. Independent Samples t-test. The results obtained from the test indicate that there was no significant difference between the scores of male group ($M=28.48$, $SD=7.05$) and female group ($M=24.91$, $SD= 8.95$), $t(27) = 1.25$, $p<.05$.

Instruments

Three types of instruments were used in this study: (1) the structure section of TOEFL, (2) a questionnaire and (3) a framework for portfolio assessment. The structure section of TOEFL is mainly concerned with structure and written expressions and includes 40 multiple choice items which are designed to measure language learners' ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English. The questionnaire used for the purpose of this study was the goal-orientation questionnaire developed and revised by Midgley, Kaplan, Middleton, Maehr, Urdan, Anderman, Anderman, & Roeser (1998). To match Midgley and colleagues' (1998) questionnaire to the needs and context of this study, the researchers adopted the 18 item questionnaire to writing assignment. Thus, the students were supposed to report on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Notably, the reliability of the writing version of the Goal Orientation questionnaire was tested using Cronbach alpha, and a satisfactory reliability index was obtained ($r=0.82$). Besides, Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian's (2001) framework of portfolio assessment was used to fulfill the purpose of this study. The framework for portfolio assessment consisted of seven steps: (1) planning the assessment purpose, (2) determining portfolio outcomes, (3) matching classroom tasks to outcomes, (4) establishing criteria for assessment, (5) determining organization, (6) monitoring the portfolio, and (7) evaluating the portfolio process.

Procedure

The data collection procedure was conducted with 2 different intact classes that were grouped in male group and female group. To ensure the homogeneity of the two groups, the researchers used a 40 item test retrieved from structures and written section of TOEFL (2003). Like the homogeneity test, Midgley's et al (1998) questionnaire was administered to both groups to test initial level of goal-orientation of female and male participants. The questionnaire was used as the pre-test to collect information on learners' goal-orientation. Later on, during the eight instructional sessions, the teacher of both groups conducted portfolio assessment technique. Firstly, she introduced the portfolio evaluation scheme to the participants of both classes. The following steps adjusted from Delett's et al (2001) framework were used as a means of portfolio evaluation:

Step1: Plan the assessment purpose

According to Delett et al (2001) a clearly stated purpose is an essential element of implementation; in other words, the purpose should explain what is being measured and

why. Regarding the aim of this study, the general purpose of using portfolio assessment was to examine its collaborative effect on goal-orientation of male and female Iranian EFL learners. Alkharusi (2009) assume both learning-oriented and performance-oriented classroom assessment environments have both positive effect on both student's self-efficacy and mastery goals, and also an indirect effect on student's mastery goals through self-efficacy. Thus, one reason for conducting this study was to find any effects of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation.

Step 2: Determine Portfolio Outcomes

The second step, as stated by Delett et al (2001), was to break down the purpose into important and relevant outcomes. The teacher can describe what knowledge or skills learners should be able to demonstrate. The acceptable outcomes for the portfolio of this study included the abilities to: (1) express their beliefs in written texts, (2) produce collaborative writings, and (3) communicate via written language.

Step 3: Match Classroom Tasks to Outcomes

To match classroom tasks to outcomes, the teacher asked the students of both classes to discuss at least two topics and write two essays for each topic. Then, they had enough sample of products which were suitable both as classroom activities and portfolio outcomes.

Step 4: Determine Organization of the Portfolio

There are three main tasks related to organization of the portfolio including assessment of the materials and resources available, determining how and where to store portfolios, and planning for the systematic collection of the portfolio entries (Delett, et al, 2001). This step has been also taken based on information given by Delett et al (2001). That is, the researcher and the teacher decided to collect writings every session and even ask the participants to email their tasks to the teacher so that she could print them and keep them in learners' portfolios for use. It was also agreed upon to keep the portfolios in the classroom so that all the participants could use them while necessary.

Step 5: Establish Criteria for Assessment

The writing papers were scored based on the Jacobs' et al (1981) scoring framework. This scoring framework is divided into five parts namely as content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics.

Step 6: Monitor the Portfolio Process

The teacher continually monitored instruction and assessment while the portfolios were implemented in the classroom. She also checked the portfolios for quantity; that is, she examined the number of assignments in the portfolios to ensure that students had included a sufficient number of samples. This step has been carried out in line with what has been suggested by Delett et al (2001)

Step 7: Evaluate the Portfolio Process

According to Delett et al (2001), in addition to monitoring the process during the portfolio semester, the teacher should also reflect on the assessment process at the end

of each semester. Although determine goal-orientation of participants was the prime goal of this research, the researcher also concentrated on this step and examined the effect of portfolios on learners' progress as well.

After eight sessions and at the end of treatment period, the same goal-orientation questionnaire was administered to measure both female and male participants' gain after implementation of portfolio assessment. The researcher collected and recorded the data and later on conducted the data analysis session. For the sake of analyzing the possible change in goal-orientation of each group, the researcher performed ANCOVA to estimate the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of both male and female groups.

RESULTS

For the sake of comparing the effectiveness of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of Iranian female and male EFL learners, the researcher used One-way ANCOVA. According to Dornyei (2007), ANCOVA is usually used to estimate the statistical significance of mean differences observed between different groups. Here, the test was performed to compare post-test scores of female and male participants while controlling for the pre-test scores as the covariate. The descriptive statistics give in Table 1 show the mean value of goal-orientation after portfolio assessment.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Goal-orientation after Portfolio Assessment

Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Female	74.4615	14.73440	13
Male	66.6250	18.23870	16
Total	70.1379	16.94049	29

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to compare the effectiveness of portfolio assessment on Iranian male and female EFL learners' goal-orientation whilst controlling for pre-test goal-orientation level. Levene's test and normality checks were carried out and the assumptions met. Table 2 shows that there was a significant difference in mean goal-orientation $F(27)=6.40$, $p=0.018$ between the two groups.

Table 2. Goal-orientation before and after Portfolio Assessment

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	4657.373	2	2328.686	17.923	.000	.580
Intercept	1658.096	1	1658.096	12.762	.001	.329
Pre-test	4216.905	1	4216.905	32.456	.000	.555
Sex	831.481	1	831.481	6.400	.018	.198
Error	3378.075	26	129.926			
Total	150696.000	29				
Correlated Total	8035.448	28				

Comparing the estimated marginal means showed that the most progress in goal-orientation was for females (mean=76.124) compared to male group's (mean=65.274). For more information refer to Table 3, below.

Table 3. The Estimated Marginal Means for Both Groups

Sex	mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Female	76.124	3.175	69.598	82.650
Male	65.274	2.859	59.397	71.152

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These results seem to go in the same way to the other studies that usually find out a statistically significant effect of portfolio assessment on learners' performance and language learning-related variables (Haung, 2011; Owings & Follo, 1992; Underwood, 2010). This finding of the present study is in line with the research carried out by Huang (2011), who claimed that assessment has a positive relationship with self-regulation. According to Zaeri and Usefli (2015), this finding can be related to those of Huang because a significant positive relationship has already been reported between self-regulation and goal-orientation.

The results also agree with those of Owings and Follo (1992) who investigated the effects of portfolio assessment on mathematics students' attitudes about grades, their awareness of their mathematics strengths and weaknesses, and their abilities to set reasonable goals. It is notable that all of the students in the portfolio group described their strengths and weaknesses in detail and provided task specific goals to overcome their weaknesses. Results of their study suggested that portfolio assessment might help students see their strengths and weaknesses so that they are more able to link successes and failures to performance. In other words, portfolio assessment might also facilitate goal setting for some students. Also Underwood's (2010) findings were similar to the general results of this study as he reported that students in the alternative assessment classrooms registered significantly higher levels of learning-goal orientation than did students in the customary classrooms. The results of these studies generally indicate the effectiveness of portfolio assessment on goal-setting. In the case of the present study, the same results were obtained since both male and female participants mean of goal-orientation has been increased in second administration of goal-orientation questionnaire. Thus, the research hypothesis indicating that portfolio assessment has a statistically significant effect on goal-orientation of Iranian EFL learners was confirmed. To test the second hypothesis, the researcher also examined the significant difference in the effect of portfolio assessment on goal-orientation of Iranian female and male EFL learners. The findings revealed that there was a significant difference in the goal-orientation of female and male participants; thus the null hypothesis was confirmed.

The research findings have implications for both language teachers and learners. Iranian English language teachers are encouraged to implement portfolio assessment to the very process of language teaching and learning. They should also consider gender as a significant factor in determining learners' goals. Likewise, Iranian male and female language learners should realize their individual differences and reconsider their variations while setting their goals.

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