Portfolio Based Assessment in a Culturally Diverse ESL Classroom: Understanding Learners' Autonomous Learning Practices

Nurbaizura Baharom[1], Mohd Sallehhudin Abd Aziz[2], & Kemboja Ismail[2]

[1] School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia

[2] Pusat Kajian Bahasa dan Linguistik, Fakulti Sains Sosial & Kemanusiaan, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Correspondence: Nurbaizura Baharom, School of Languages, Civilisation and Philosophy, Universiti Utara Malaysia, 06010 Sintok, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia

Abstract

Purpose – The promotion of portfolios and portfolio-based assessment in the teaching of writing skills is not a novel approach at both secondary and tertiary levels. Apart from the interest on the writing process, portfolio is popular because of its role in enabling variation of writing forms. Interestingly, with portfolio assessment, students' actual classroom performance is facilitated and assessed by the teacher, making it a student – centered assessment, which is advantageous in disclosing more useful and effective information for teachers and students. Apart from being advanced as an significant and beneficial tool in teaching as well as testing in English as a foreign language, portfolio is also seen as an alternative assessment tool that enables opportunities for authentic, active language learning, and evaluation of student progress. In addition, as formative assessment, portfolio assessment is also regarded as a type that promotes learner autonomy. The use of portfolio evaluation and the promotion of independent learning among English as a Second Language (ESL) tertiary students of various ethnicities will be discussed in this study.

Methodology – Data was acquired from two students via face-to-face interviews for this pilot project. They were selected through purposeful, and homogeneous sampling. Sociocultural theory and a re-conceptualized conception of learner autonomy are the study's research parameters.

Findings – While preparing and completing their portfolio-based assessment, these participants did experience or practise the three sub aspects (motivational, affective, and metacognitive) of this psychological element of autonomy.

Significance – Portfolio evaluation allows students to exercise autonomous learning in its various psychological sub aspects, according to the findings of this study. The findings are hoped to aid both English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors and students in their efforts to better understand and improve the teaching and learning of writing skills through the usage of a writing portfolio.

Keywords: alternative assessment, portfolios, learner autonomy, portfolio assessment, sociocultural theory

1. Introduction

Globalization and the continuous development of technology have influenced the acceptance of English as a language actively sought for the purpose of communication. Because English is viewed as the globally accepted language for communication in various important fields, Malaysians are actively encouraged to learn and be able to communicate in English. Relatively, globalization could also be a factor influencing the way English language is presently taught, assessed and learned in Malaysia, as being skillful in English opens up more opportunities in handling the challenging global reality. Even then, as mentioned by Leela Mohd Ali (2007), good English language skills provides more opportunities in this global reality as English is seen as the preferred language in accessing information about important fields such as communication, technology, business, and education. In fact, English has long been seen as an asset in establishing international connections and for the development of science and technology (Asmah Haji Omar, 1993). In recent time, English is still acknowledged as an important language in Malaysia, as noted by Sidhu, Kaur and Chi (2018). According to these researchers, the importance of English is

evident in its identification as Malaysia's second official language in the Malaysian educational context. It is also a language necessary to be used in various fields such as business, entertainment, information technology and science sectors of the economy. In addition, English is also the language dominating the internet.

In the Malaysian English language teaching and learning context, despite the progression of alternative approach in assessing students' English language performance, it seems that the emphasis is more on the centralized public summative examination. Because of this, students study English for examination purposes, not for exploring and gaining more knowledge about the language. Consequently, students become passive leaners in their classroom (Charanjit Kaur A/P Swaran Singh, Arshad Abdul Samad, Habsah Hussin & Tajularipin Sulaiman, 2015). According to Weigle (2002), the increasing role of writing instruction in L2 language education has resulted in making effective writing ability more important for English as a second language (ESL) student. However, in the Malaysian ESL context, writing in English language has always been a problem to students (Mohd. Saat Abbas, Suzihana Saharan, Yahya Che Lah & Abd. Rashid Mohamad, 2005). Other research also highlighted problems concerning the ESL Malaysian learners' English writing ability at the tertiary level (Wan Hurani Osman & Anna Lynn Abu Bakar (2009); Noriah Ismail, Supyan Hussin & Saadiah Darus (2012); Ong Poh Lin & Nooreiny Maarof (2013); Anis Ashraf Zadeh & Vahid Nimechisalem (2015)). Researchers Ong Poh Lin and Nooreiny Maarof (2013) highlighted the importance of exploring different approaches, methods, and pedagogies of teaching and learning to suit the changing educational needs and approaches of the current classroom setting when addressing problems related to writing ability of ESL Malaysian learners. They recommended a more interactive pedagogy in teaching writing to replace the traditional method as a way to assist the majority of the current Malaysian students who experience problem in writing in English, this is due to a lack of interest in and aptitude in writing skills. They recommend the need for other alternative approaches in the teaching of writing to ESL learners. Their statement appears to reflect an earlier viewpoint offered by Hamp - Lyons and Condon (2000), who stated that more programmes at all levels, including college level, have acknowledged and responded to the faults or limitations of traditional, comprehensive evaluation. This involves the shift away from traditional, holistic assessments of student writing and toward portfolio-based assessments. Fortunately, tertiary level educators in Malaysia have earlier on shifted their focus onto alternative based assessment such as portfolio assessment as a way to identify and increase the academic performance of the students (Mohd Rashid Mohd Saad & Mohd Asri Mohd Noor, 2007). Researchers like Ong (2010), Othman, Salleh and Md. Norani (2013) have also observed the change in the testing culture by the Malaysian ESL (English as a Second Language) providers who have gradually shifted from the traditional summative way of testing to a more formative assessment that permits teachers to observe and record their students' learning and accomplishment (Sidhu, Kaur, & Chi, 2018). What's more promising is that Malaysian pupils have reacted well to the deployment of portfolio evaluation (Fook & Sidhu, 2010). It's acceptance in the Malaysian education context is continuously documented, as apparent in some recent literatures pertaining portfolio assessment by researchers such as Kalai Selvan Arunmugham (2019, a & b), Rahim et.al (2019), Ngui, Pang and Hiew (2019), S. Hashim, A. Ismail and A. Masek (2017) and Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz and Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff (2015).

The positivist paradigm, which emphasises the uniformity of the testing instrument and focuses on whether the learner achieves a high score, underpins traditional evaluation. Traditional assessment is based on the positivist paradigm, which emphasises the standardisation of the testing instrument and focuses on whether the learner achieves a high score (Murphy & Grant, 1996: Hamp – Lyons & Condon, 2000). Portfolio-based assessment is the polar opposite of traditional assessment, which is based on the positivist paradigm, which emphasises the standardisation of the testing instrument and focuses on whether the learner achieves a high score. Furthermore, this kind of evaluation generates strong support for several of the most effective composition teaching and learning approaches, which may match the ESL tertiary education level's written literacy requirement. Some of the many potential benefits of portfolio include fostering intrinsic motivation, responsibility, and ownership (Brown, 2004). According to Moradan and Hedayati (2012) the advantages of portfolio are mentioned in quite a large number of literatures by scholars such as Genesee and Upsur (1996), Burch (2000), Song and August (2002), Brown (2004), and Nezakatgoo (2005). According to Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001); Banfi, (2003); Yang, (2003); and Allen (2004), previous research in foreign language learning has revealed portfolios to be an effective way to combine pedagogy, learning, and evaluation while also encouraging critical thinking and learner autonomy. Traditional assessment methods, according to researchers like Javanmard and Farahani (2012), do not engage students in their learning, teaching, and assessment processes because there is no direct or indirect link between them. Portfolio assessment, on the other hand, allows students to actively participate in the learning, teaching, and assessment aspects. As a result, portfolio assessment is viewed as a type of evaluation that allows students to have more control over their learning and become more assertive and independent thinkers. It also enables students to

keep track of their own academic progress, assume responsibility for their education, and reflect on their own learning and development. Due of its collaborative nature and learner-centered approach, portfolio writing has previously been recognised as a motivational tool for students. As a result, it encourages independent learning by allowing students to modify their work, track their progress, and self-evaluate and discover their own strengths and limitations (Farrah, 2018).

Despite the reported effectiveness of portfolio assessment in encouraging autonomous learning, as evidenced by the studies discussed in the literature review concerning portfolio assessment and learner autonomy, little research attention has been paid to understanding the relationship between portfolio assessment and learner autonomy, particularly in ESL writing research involving ESL learners of various ethnicities. As a result, the purpose of this study is to see how a portfolio evaluation built for a tertiary intermediate course fosters learner autonomy in a group of ESL learners with a variety of educational, personal, and cultural backgrounds. The research parameters are determined by the research objectives, questions and the selected theoretical frameworks. This paper sets forth the results of a pilot study that was conducted via face- to- face interview with two Malaysian students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Alternative Assessment

Authentic, thorough, or performance assessment are all terms used to describe alternative assessment. This form of assessment is usually created by the teacher to determine whether or not the pupils have grasped the material in the classroom. Literature on alternative assessment highlighted the acceptance of this type of assessment as a means to evaluate learners' language proficiency and learning progress. Alternative assessment methodologies, according to Moradan and Hedayati (2012), have gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Furthermore, due to the opportunity for authentic, active language learning and a considerably more extensive evaluation of student progress afforded by alternative assessment, it has gained support not only from western educators, but also from their eastern counterparts. Acceptance of portfolio-based evaluation to evaluate pupils' language performance is also part of this. Teachers used paper and pencil tests and performance assessments to determine the outcome or product of learning in the traditional techniques of assessing the effects of education on students learning a second language (Tavakoli & Amirian, 2012).

2.2 Portfolios

Portfolio is the result of the request from the teaching community; they requested for the types of assessment that are more responsive to students', teachers' and even parents' needs. The emphasis is on performance assessment, a contrast to the more traditional test scores, thus opening the opportunity for portfolio – based assessment, by using portfolio to collect students' performances. Portfolios have also been shown to be effective pedagogical, teacher development, and assessment tools (Hamp – Lyons & Condon, 2000). Moya and O'Malley (1994) define a portfolio as "a collection of a student's work, experiences, exhibitions, and self-ratings (i.e. data)" (p.2). Weigle (2002) defines it as a collection of textual items produced throughout time for a variety of causes. Portfolios are also seen as particularly appropriate assessment tools for non-native English speakers because they allow for a more thorough evaluation of students' abilities and because they replace the timed writing context, which has long been argued to be particularly discriminatory toward non-native writers (Hamp – Lyons & Condon, 2000).

2.3 Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio assessment came to light because of two reasons: the need to measure more complex phenomena in assessing writing to accommodate more complex reasons and for the purpose of integrating instruction and assessment (Hamp – Lyons & Condon, 2000). Hamp – Lyons and Condon (2000) define it as "a collection of writing that contains a multiplicity of texts and that incorporates information about the writing context, not merely the writing itself". They furthermore state that this definition of portfolio assessment is the "primary building block" for the theory of portfolio – based writing assessment (p.118). Weigle (2002, p.197) sees it as "an alternate approach to writing assessment that can allow broader inferences about writing ability than single-shot techniques to assessing writing, both in the individual classroom and on a larger scale" than single-shot approaches to evaluating writing. The benefits of portfolio assessments have been grouped into three categories in the literature: boosting students' learning, enhancing the teacher's role, and improving testing methods (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

2.4 Learner Autonomy

Little (2015, p.1) admits in his paper that learner autonomy is a difficult notion to describe because it is frequently confused with self-education. It's also a "slippery idea" because describing it effectively is extremely difficult. According to Benson (2007), autonomy in language education began with the Council of Europe's Modern

Languages Project, which culminated in the publication of Henri Holec's (1981) major report, which defined autonomy as "the ability to assume responsibility for one's own learning" (p.3). Holec's concept of learner autonomy has remained the most frequently mentioned in the field of learner autonomy. In Holec's definition of learner autonomy, 'ability' is frequently replaced by 'capacity,' according to Benson. Holec frequently substituted 'take charge of' with 'take responsibility for' or 'take control of' one's own learning. Even while the phrase was also used to describe learning settings, he believed autonomy to be a characteristic or a trait of the learner. There are also some other definitions available according to the respective scholars and the context they are referring to. It is agreed by many that "the practice of learner autonomy requires insight, a positive attitude, a capacity for reflection, and a readiness to be proactive in self – management and in interaction with others" (Little, 2015 p.1). Little further opines that with this working definition, the challenge of learner autonomy is identified as "a holistic view of the learner that requires us to engage with the cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social dimensions of language learning and to worry about how they interact with one another" (p.1). Learner autonomy research has provided the basis for the notion that the western model of autonomy in language teaching does not suit each student's learning style. Asian pupils were taught utilising western learning approaches in the study by Rees – Miller (1993), for example. Because they were not allowed to use their favoured learning strategy of rote repetition, the pupils in the study performed badly (Egel, 2009). Littlewood (1999) claims that portraying autonomy in language acquisition is a western concept that does not apply to contexts such as East Asia, where educational traditions differ. He thoughtfully suggests that different components of autonomy should be combined with the qualities and demands of learners in specific circumstances. Learner autonomy, according to Ahmadi and Mahdavi–Zafarghandi (2013), is a challenging concept to grasp in Asian cultures since it contradicts the teacher's conventional role as the authoritative figure and initiator in the classroom. Gholami (2016), on the other hand, claims that autonomy practise is a rare concern in some educational systems and that it is better suited to western culture. He also claims that, in today's world, learners in non-western cultures are still unfamiliar with the concept of learner autonomy.

2.5 Issues in Portfolio Assessment and Learner Autonomy

Portfolio grading has been frequently utilised to assist students improve their writing skills for the past thirty years. Much of the research on portfolio assessment focuses on students' and teachers' perspectives on its advantages, as well as how it enhances students' motivation and writing abilities in general (Lam, 2014). According to Charanjit Kaur a/p Swaran Singh, Arshad Abdul Samad, Habsah Hussin, and Tajularipin Sulaiman (2015), most studies on portfolio evaluation have been done in the first language context, documenting perspectives, reflections, and also the experiences of teachers teaching in that environment. They also mention the lack in the current literatures on the use of portfolio as an assessment tool in the Malaysian education setting by citing a few studies conducted on the subject matter as examples, among others by Chan and Sidhu (2010), Mokhtar (2010), Sidhu, Chan and Hazadiah (2008), and Kemboja (2006). Literature pertaining learner autonomy on the other hand demonstrated the increasing interest to the field of learner autonomy. This is evident in research conducted at both school and tertiary levels on these aspects (among others) concerning learner autonomy such as the development of a valid and reliable instrument to quantitatively measure the degree of learner autonomy (Murase, 2007), investigating learners' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward autonomous learning (Mineishi, 2010; Demirtas & Sert, 2010; Ahmadi & Mahdavi – Zafarghandi, 2013; Razeq, 2014 ; Riasati & Mollaei, 2014; Chang & Geary, 2015; Sani & Vaseghi, 2015), the promotion of learner autonomy in English as Second Language teaching context (Liu,2018),   and the practice of learner autonomy among teachers (Alkan & Arslan, 2019). There are also studies that yield the connection between portfolio assessment and learner autonomy. In comparing the strengths of portfolio assessment to traditional types of assessment, Barnhardt, Kevorkian, and Delett (1998) found that, among other things, portfolio evaluation enables students to learn how to accept responsibility for their learning. The inclusion of a portfolio in the classroom assessment, according to Chung (2012), encourages students to be responsible for their own learning for the following reasons: they must prepare their own portfolio with teacher assistance; they are aware of the grading criteria and are allowed to participate in developing the grading criteria with their teacher. This notion is also supported by Charanjit Kaur and Arshad Abdul Samad (2013) who discover that, apart from improving students' learning motivation and self – respect, portfolio assessment also encourages students to be responsible learners.

2.6 Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of sociocultural theory (SCT) and Murase's (2007, 2015) reconceptualized construct of learner autonomy are used in this study. It has been highlighted that there has been a growing interest in sociocultural theory (SCT) and its implications for classroom learning and teaching research. The interpretations and implementations of sociocultural approaches are similarly diverse, indicating a growing interest in this perspective (John – Steiner & Mahn, 1996). According to John – Steiner and Mahn, Vygotsky and his colleagues "systemized

and implemented" sociocultural ways to learning and development in the 1920s and 1930s (p.191.). These sociocultural methods are founded on the assumption that human activities are mediated by language and other symbol systems and are best understood when examined through the prism of history. According to this hypothesis, social contact and cultural institutions such as classrooms, schools, and other similar settings play a significant influence in a person's cognitive growth (Donato & Mccormick, 1994). Interpersonal interaction and intramental activity have a close link in SCT, with the former acting as an antecedent for the latter. Because of Lantolf and his colleagues' aggressive promotion, SCT is a highly well-known theory in second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis, 2008). According to Lantolf (2000), the basic premise that differentiates SCT is that higher levels of mental activity are mediated. Internal mediation in SCT is obtained by external mediation. According to Lantolf, mediation in second language learning includes mediation by others in social contact, mediation by self through private speech, and mediation by artefacts (such as tasks and technology). Private communication, in which the learner interacts with himself or herself, is likewise considered an interaction in his opinion.

Learner autonomy is a difficult concept to explain since it is frequently mistaken with self-education. It's also a tough concept to describe accurately, which makes it a "slippery concept" (Little, 2015, p.1). As a result, quantifying or studying the growth of learner autonomy, whether numerically or qualitatively, can be difficult. Recognizing this, the researcher chose to demonstrate the development of students' autonomy while completing their portfolio assessment using Murase's (2007, 2015) reconceptualized construct of learner autonomy as a framework alongside Sociocultural theory. Murase's reimagined concept of learner autonomy was designed specifically for Asian (Japanese) students. As a result, the construct's adaption was considered as fitting the researcher's environment because it concerns Asian students. Learner autonomy has been re-conceptualized and operationalized by Murase to cover four primary dimensions: technical, psychological, political-philosophical, and socio-cultural autonomy.

3. Methodology

This pilot project employed a qualitative research approach to acquire preliminary data on how to promote autonomous learning practises through portfolio assessment. Data was acquired from two Malaysian students through a face-to-face semi-structured interview session in order to achieve the study's objectives.

3.1 Participants

Purposive (Creswell, 2008) and homogenous (Dornyei, 2007) sampling were used to identify individuals for this pilot project. The participants were chosen by the researcher on purpose in order to better understand the phenomenon in question: how a portfolio assessment designed for an intermediate course at a tertiary level promotes learner autonomy in a group of ESL students with a variety of educational, personal, and cultural backgrounds. According to Berg (2007), purposive sampling strategy is the type that would enable the researcher to use their "special knowledge or expertise" (p.44) about certain groups in selecting subjects who represent this selected population. In this study, specific sorts of people with specific characteristics are included, and they are sometimes chosen after field studies. Because the participants are students who have completed a portfolio evaluation, homogeneous sampling was used in this study as well. The process of selecting the participants for this study started with the researcher contacting the Chief coordinator of the English language subjects for information about the English courses which incorporate the use of portfolio assessment as a form of coursework in their syllabus and the names of the course coordinators. Once the researcher has received the information about the potential courses, the researcher then proceeded to obtain permission from the Dean of the school to conduct the research. This was followed by the course identification stage. After identifying the potential course (that included portfolio assessment as a form of coursework), the researcher proceeded to contact the course coordinator. A meet between the researcher and the selected course coordinator followed where the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the intention to obtain permission to include the course and some of the students in the study. Since a low number of students enrolled for the course in that semester, only three classes were offered and the course coordinator was the only teacher (later referred to as the classroom teacher) teaching the three classes. Permission to conduct the study, visit the classes and meet the students was obtained and the classroom teacher later provided the researcher with the student name lists for the purpose of participant selection (for the pilot study and the actual study). In the following week, during class hour, the researcher went to the three classrooms and introduced herself and explained the purpose of the study to the students; that they were approached to be included in the study because they were in a course that incorporated the use of portfolio assessment in a form of course work and that they would have had the experience of doing a portfolio based assessment. In each class, after explaining the purpose of the study, the researcher handed a file that contains the written information about the research, consent form and other forms related to the study. The students were informed that their participation in the study is strictly on voluntary basis. They were also assured that their identity would be kept confidential. They were permitted to take the file and read the

information at home. In the following week, during class hour, those who agreed to participate returned the signed consent form while those who declined participation were requested to return the file and all its contents. Twenty students, a mix from the three classes agreed to participate in the study. Due to scheduling conflict related to university's final examination and the low participation of male students in the study, the researcher had to include two female students: Ling (pseudonym) of Chinese ethnicity and Azura (pseudonym), of Malay ethnicity in the pilot study. Eighteen students (male and female) were included in the actual study. Unfortunately, scheduling conflict related to the final examination was also the reason for the exclusion of another two female students before the start of the interview sessions, narrowing the number of participants to sixteen. To protect their identity, all sixteen participants were later identified and addressed by their chosen pseudonym.

3.2 Instruments

A qualitative study intends to understand the investigated phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Qualitative research, according to Merriam (2002), is largely concerned with the idea or belief that meaning is socially formed by individuals in their interactions with their surrounds or reality. The surrounding environment or reality is not considered in this sort of research as "the fixed, single, agreed-upon, or measurable phenomenon" as it is in quantitative research (p.3). Reality's constructs and interpretations, on the other hand, are not static and are subject to variation and change. In this pilot study, the focus is to investigate and understand how portfolio-based assessment promotes or encourages autonomous learning for English as a second language (ESL) tertiary students of different ethnicity at a public university in Malaysia. In this case, portfolio assessment is employed to facilitate the development of students' writing skills or abilities in the English language. To answer the research questions and for the purpose of data collection, a set of semi – structured interview questions adapted and adopted from Alabdelwahab (2002), Chung (2012) and Murase (2015) was prepared. The interview questions were also based on the triangulation of two theoretical frameworks: Sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000) and Murase's (2007, 2015) reconceptualised construct of learner autonomy. Prior to the pilot test, the interview questions were reviewed by three experts in the field of English language education and Applied Linguistics. First, in order to truly understand how portfolio assessment encourages autonomous learning for these participants in their ESL classroom, they were asked about portfolio and portfolio assessment in the second part of the interview. The three questions related to portfolio and portfolio assessment are considered important in the study because the researcher needed to ensure that the participants know and understand that they were doing portfolio-based assessment for their essay writing task. Their responses would help to uncover their knowledge and understanding of portfolio and portfolio assessment, their views on the purpose(s) behind the inclusion of portfolio assessment and their essay writing preferences. In the third part of the interview, the participants were asked about their autonomous learning practices while completing portfolio assessment. The participants' responses were collected and analyzed based on Murase's (2007, 2015) four major dimensions of learner autonomy. The interview sessions were conducted in English. Upon request from the participants or when necessary, that is when to confirm their understanding of the questions, Bahasa Malaysia, the national language of Malaysia, was also used by the researcher. The participants were allowed to respond in either English or Bahasa Malaysia. The first participant, Ling, preferred to use English throughout the interview session while the second participant, Azura, chose to use both Bahasa Malaysia and English in conveying her opinions.

4. Data Analysis

Before the analysis, the participants' interview responses in the form of a transcript were merged into one document. For the purpose of coding, they were placed in a table according to the interview questions. This was conducted as a means to guide the researcher while she was analyzing the data. This study's qualitative data analysis involved the two aspects of data analysis namely 'data handling and interpretation' (Gibbs, 2007, p.2). This is where the qualitative data were first analyzed using the 'office' procedures by sorting, retrieving, indexing, handling and the inclusion of some discussion on how these processes can be employed to produce analytic ideas or data. This is followed by data reduction into summaries or displays, before ending with interpretive analysis and conclusion (Gibbs, 2007). Since the objective of the research involves finding patterns and explaining how portfolio based assessment promotes autonomous learning, analysis of the qualitative data was also conducted by looking at the "two contrasting logics of explanation: induction (data driven coding) and deduction (concept or theory driven coding) "based on analytic style or guidelines proposed by Gibbs (2007, pp. 4 - 5).

Data in reference to research question number one (RQ1) were analyzed according to both data driven coding and concept coding approaches while data in reference to research question number two (RQ2) were analyzed according to the concept driven approach. Gibbs (2007) posits that it is possible to compile a code list or the codebook without the initial reference to the data collected by the researcher. The categories or concepts represented by the codes may

be sourced among others from the research literature, previous studies, topics discussed in the interview or researcher's hunches about what is going on in the study etc. For this study, the structured list of codes and the rules for the application (their definitions) are based on Murase's (2007, 2015) four dimensions of learner autonomy. The reason for the approach taken in analyzing the data was because in investigating research question one (RQ1), the intention is to explore the 'open' responses from the participants while at the same time also looking at the data in reference to the chosen frameworks. However, in examining data for RQ2, data analysis was guided by Murase's learner autonomy construct.

5. Result and Discussion

This paper will only be discussing selected data analyzed for RQ2 from the pilot study. This is from Murase's Psychological aspect or dimension of learner autonomy. Under the psychological dimension, there are three sub-dimensions/aspects. The motivational sub-dimension is the first, and it includes intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in the process of preparing and completing portfolio assessments, the ability to take control of one's learning by understanding motivational strategies, and one's responsibility for success or failure in learning essay writing through portfolio assessment. The ability to govern one's own learning through knowing one's affective states, such as worry, self-esteem, and other emotions, and how to control them, is the second sub-dimension. Participants were asked to reflect on their personal capacity to take control of their learning, their strengths and limitations while attempting to write an essay in English, and their efforts to control or overcome their flaws while planning and completing their portfolio evaluation. The third sub-dimension of Murase's learner autonomy is metacognitive – the ability to regulate one's own learning by understanding one's own learning, including requirements, preferences, strengths, limitations, and metacognitive techniques. Here the participants were requested to response to the idea that the process of preparing and completing a writing portfolio is ineffective without a goal or an objective, that a portfolio assessment must be guided by an objective so that the execution of it by the students will be effective. The participants were also requested to state their actions or the measures that they took in order to achieve the objective of portfolio assessment attempted by them in their English proficiency course.

The interview questions were piloted in order to better prepare the researcher, who was new to the field, for the real study. The data gathered by a concept or theory-driven (deductive) method on one of Murase's four dimensions or elements of learner autonomy, namely the psychological dimension, yielded the following results. This analysis is in reference to RQ2 of the study.

5.1 Sub- dimension 1: Motivational: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Ling looked to be intrinsically driven when preparing and completing the portfolio assessment since she was confident in her ability to find the article. She said that this was not her first time doing "research" (i.e., looking up articles) and that she was good at organising her thoughts. Her language teacher's verbal response later confirmed these two features, which she believed provided her the inner motivation to study for and complete her portfolio exam. This appears to be in accordance with what many experts have established, namely that portfolio assessment frequently permits students' language abilities to be reinforced in a favourable way (Kalra, Sundrarajun & Komintarachat, 2017). The following table summarises an excerpt from Ling:

Table 1. Extracted data for intrinsic motivation - Ling

Participant	Data extract
Ling	I feel like, um, quite confident, Uh because I think, I – I can do it alone. Um…because *I'm done my research*, and I have, like, *arranged my idea well*, and… I also, will ask lecturer whether can, uh do this uh, uh like, the consequences is okay or not. And your lecturer gives you feedback?
Researcher	*Ha, lecturer give me feedback.*
Ling	Ah…And when your lecturer says yes, you think "okay
Researcher	Aa…
Ling	I'm on the right track"
Researcher Ling	Yeah yeah yeah, I'm …Then when submit, when I do the, final essay, I will write uh quite confidently, ha

Portfolio assessment is intrinsically motivating for the second participant, Azura, because she discovered that the step-by-step approach in portfolio assessment (that is, the preparation of various draughts) aided her in writing in English, a finding that echoes Hamp – Lyons and Condon (2000), who state that the use of portfolios has replaced the timed writing context, which is acknowledged to be unique. She has come to like English and has given more attention to the process involved in preparing an essay because she was able to comment on the writing process she

went through in class when doing portfolio evaluation. It also changed her perception of essay writing in English as a difficult endeavour, transforming her into a confident student who now considers English writing to be a straightforward work. To summarise, she seemed to be naturally motivated to prepare and finish her portfolio assessment since she enjoyed the process and the language. Hashemian and Fadaei (2013) found that adopting a portfolio (as a learning tool) can significantly boost learners' autonomy and motivate them to become more dynamic language learners. The following table summarises an excerpt from Azura:

Table 2. Extracted data for intrinsic motivation - Azura

Participant	Data extract
Azura	Um… (I) *like English, like English because it, uh when we do step by step, we see it like more easy.* Ha, like that.
Researcher	Okay, so, does it make you *pay more attention* to English?
Azura	(Chuckles) Um…*Yes,* mm…
Researcher	How?
Azura	Um, uh *it's like it attracts us when the thing looks easy*, hmm. It's not as complicated as I assumed it would be. Something like that.
Researcher	Ha…so can I say that it makes you feel confident?
Azura	Mm yeah
Researcher	Ha…comfortable in using English?
Azura	Mm yeah.
Researcher	Because *the process makes it easy*?
Azura	Mm, *makes it easy*.

Surprisingly, both participants seemed to attribute different extrinsic motivators for planning and completing their portfolio assessments. The time limit to complete the portfolio assessment was recommended by Ling, while the fact that the evaluation was graded or assessed was chosen by Azura as the most important component in creating and completing hers. She also mentioned her work ethic as a consideration, as she is the type of person who will complete a task once it has been handed to her (by the language teacher or lecturer). Here are some quotes from both participants:

Table 3. Extracted data for extrinsic motivation for both participants

Participant	Data extract
Ling	Um, *in specific time set by lecturer. Un – under time, pressure*
Researcher	*Time pressure* set by the lecturer?
Ling	*Yeah.*
Researcher	Okay…So that was, *that's the main factor*?
Ling	*Ye…ah.*
Azura	*Because, (pause) it is graded* maybe? (chuckles)
Researcher	Because, you have to do it?
Azura	*Yeah.* And then uh, because I, *if given work, I will still do it*, ha, it's like that.

Both of them replied differently when asked if they would prepare and complete their portfolio evaluation if it was not graded or assessed by their language teacher. Ling would continue to work on her portfolio's various draughts before presenting her finished essay to her language teacher. Azura, on the other hand, stated that her mood would influence the way she prepared and finished unassessed portfolio draughts. If she felt like it, she would complete the assessment, and vice versa. She also claimed that if she went ahead with it, she would just write the last essay and not the others. Even though Azura stated earlier that the process of doing portfolio assessment had made her like English and paid attention to the essay writing process, and that her work ethic would prompt her to do the task (portfolio), it appears that her intrinsic motivation is low when there is no external motivation, i.e., if her portfolio assessment was not to be graded or assessed, her willingness to do it was reduced or lacking, which is in contrast to Ling who stressed that her intrinsic motivation is high when there is no external motivation. Ling's intrinsic drive, or internal incentive, to prepare and complete her hypothetical unassessed portfolio evaluation appears unaffected by a lack of external motivation (marks), but rather as an act of following the teacher's directions. This could have been regarded by her as a student's dedication to her teacher. As mentioned by Littlewood, many teachers and researchers agree that East Asian societies' collectivist orientation, acceptance of power and authority-based relationships, and belief that effort and innate abilities are equally important in achieving success are three important sources that have strongly influenced East Asian students' approach to learning (1999). Despite the fact that Ling is not from East Asian countries like the Republic of China or Taiwan, she is of Chinese descent, and her replies mirrored Littlewood's findings. Another researcher, Ivanovska (2015, p. 354), comments that no matter how much one believes in "human universals," one cannot entirely reject one's own cultural views and behaviours, which have

formed him or her for a long time. Both individuals, who are of different nations, had varied reactions to the event, which could be attributed to their cultural upbringing. Following are some quotes from both parties:

Table 4. Extracted data on extrinsic motivations of both participants

Participant	Data extract
Ling	I would submit it. Uh, uh I would complete it first, then I would submit it also.
Researcher	Uh huh…Even though it is not, uh obligatory, it is not compulsory to submit it?
Ling	Ah, yeah.
Researcher	Uh, *just because it's a task?*
Ling	Yeah.
Azura	Okay, it depend on situation, example like that time my mood is okay, ha I'll do it, mood not okay (chuckles) no.
Researcher	(Laughs) Ha, *so you don't really mind if it's not graded,*
Azura	Hmm, yeah,
Researcher	Uh, chances are you might not submit it?
Azura	Um…I'll see, if I am free, uh I'll submit, ha.
Researcher	Ha, or, uh you do, certain parts, some parts not completed, like that?
Azura	Ha, maybe I'll just do the essay, not the drafts.
Researcher	Ha, so you just complete one part, just the essay?
Azura	Ha
Researcher	The earlier drafts, maybe not?
Azura	Not likely

5.2 Sub – Dimension 2: Affective – Own

When they were performing their portfolio evaluation, they were both worried about the challenges they were having with various aspects of language. Ling was worried about how she would do in the grammar section of the language. She did, however, come to the conclusion that she knew what needed to be done to resolve the problem: she needed to learn more in order to better her grammar knowledge and abilities. Despite having the same issue as Ling, Azura seemed to be concerned about more areas of the English language, which she learned while completing her portfolio assessment. Her worry stems from the English language's components of spelling, grammar, vocabulary, and translation. When pressed by the researcher, she admitted that understanding her limitations in these areas of the language is useful since it allows her to learn more and improve her command of the language. Both participants' conclusions appear to be in line with what Hart had previously indicated (1992, as cited in Kalra, Sundrarajun, & Komintarachat, 2017) and Hamp – Lyons and Condon (2000): Hart (1992) asserts that portfolios allow students to showcase their abilities rather than their limitations, this is advantageous for students who have weak English skills or who are non-native English speakers. Portfolios, on the other hand, are explicitly recognised as appropriate evaluation tools to employ with non-native English – speaking students, according to Hamp – Lyons and Condon (2000), since they enable a broader estimate of students' competence. Tables 5 and 6 show their response in detail:

Table 5. Extracted data on affective aspect of motivation- Ling

Participant	Data extract
Ling	Yeah, in some way, because um, I've, find sometime, I find about *my, grammar is not so okay,* um, *so I need to improve my grammar.*
Researcher	Uh huh? Okay, how do you know that, your grammar is not okay and that you have to improve it?
Ling	Uh, because um, sometime I've, I'm, um because I do some exercise before I do my final essay, uh I write, write and compare with the article that I find, and feel eh, sometime, um, it is like, the, *my sentence was, um, quite lousy sometimes.* Um, then *I change it, in, um, bet-ter sentence, and, better grammar,* because *I did some, a bit of grammar error.*

Table 6. Extracted data on affective aspect of motivation - Azura

Participant	Data extract
Azura	Um, yeah. Okay, uh I can see like, *my lang-uh, spelling, my language, then my plural singular, all that, hmm.*
Researcher	Hmm… So things that are related to the language?
Azura	Hmm.
Researcher	Like, vocabulary, grammar, spelling?
Azura	Hmm.
Researcher	Hmm… So how do you identify that this is my strength or this is my weakness?
Azura	Uh, it's like, I feel like *it's hard to do* that thing, ha. I feel like, no…no…no…uh what is this, uh it's hard to do this thing, (I) *feel uncomfortable*.
Researcher	Okay, so do you know how to study to improve your English?
Azura	I know Uh, another weakness maybe, uh I, rarely use English, so when I rarely (use English), *it's hard to translate* right, maybe I have a sentence in Malay, maybe I want to translate it to English, it becomes a bit complicated ha, because (I) rarely use (English) so, it's hard to, ha I forget how to translate (chuckles). So when you know - during that time you know that okay, after this I have to improve on that.
Researcher	Yeah.
Azura	

5.3 Sub – dimension 3: Metacognitive

Ling was aware of her ability in preparing and completing the portfolio. Knowing the process and the drafts that must be prepared for the assessment made her nervous of the time taken to prepare the portfolio as she knew and decided that she must follow the timeline requested by the language teacher. The following table details her response on this matter:

Table 7. Extracted data on metacognitive aspect of motivation - Ling

Participant	Data extract
Ling	Um…*maybe nervous*, I must submit, my, the portfolio, *I think the time*. Maybe.
Researcher	Uh, you must, uh submit it on time?
Ling	Uh yeah.

In order to fulfil the goal of the portfolio assessment assigned to her, Ling had taken some measures such as planning her writing according to the tasks requested in the assessment that is: drafts preparation. She also realized that she learned to write better essay in the time limit given by the teacher and she also managed to evaluate her improvements in writing when she was in the process of completing her portfolio assessment. When prompted about how she felt about having to write according to the time limit (because the final draft was prepared in the class in under one-hour time limit) she took it as a challenge and seemed to favor it. Ling clearly knew her strengths and weaknesses and used that knowledge to guide her in her process of preparing and completing her portfolio. The following table details her responses:

Table 8. Extracted data on metacognitive aspect of motivation - Ling

Participant	Data extract
Researcher	Does the goal of doing your portfolio make you plan your writing?
Ling	Yeah. May learn…learn to…write bet..ter essay.
Researcher	Does it allow you to assess the effectiveness of (portfolio assessment)?
Ling	Yeah, yeah, it is. Um, we need to think faster for me essay, prepare essay, ha.
Researcher	Because you have to write it in the class right?
Ling	Yes, so, think faster.
Researcher	Ah, do you like doing it (write in the class) that way?
Ling	I like the way. I …sometimes like to do writing, under pressure.
Researcher	Ah..okay. So it's sort of like a challenge for yourself?
Ling	Yeah, yes.
Researcher	Alright, but if you were given another choice, of doing it in a much more relaxed way, at your room for example, would you prefer that or would you still prefer doing it in the class?
Ling	I still prefer doing it in the class.

In the course of preparing and completing her portfolio assessment, Azura also exhibited the usage of metacognitive methods. This may be seen in the manner she laid out her portfolio's execution. She indicated how she carefully selected and extracted some points from the articles that she chose before including them in her essay. She also mentioned that she had chosen the most manageable (i.e. easy) topic to be discussed so that she would be able to easily elaborate the points or ideas extracted from the chosen articles, provide examples to support the ideas and in

the end achieve a good grade that she wanted when she first started doing this assessment. The following table 9 contains extracts from a conversation with Azura on this subject matter:

Table 9. Extracted data on metacognitive aspect of motivation - Azura

Participant	Data extract
Azura	My goal is to get higher mark (laughs) To get higher mark.
Researcher	Okay, so what did you do, to achieve that goal?
Azura	*Uh I will take, points with many ideas, then an easy topic that contains familiar information, then I will take easy points included in the article. Ha... (The essay) just needs three points (main ideas) right? So that's a lot of points, just take three easy ones with a lot of ideas (information).*
	The *easiest* for you?
Researcher	*Ha, yeah.*
Azura	And when you say a lot of ideas, what do you mean by that?
Researcher	*Meaning, I can elaborate the points more, then I can use examples that really suit the topic.*
Azura	

The findings from both participants parallel the findings presented by Abhakorn (2014) which shows portfolios to be a good mediation tool in disclosing the learner's "metacognitive knowledge and current level of metacognitive strategies" (Kalra, Sundrarajun & Komintarachat, 2017, p. 294).

6. Conclusion

During the above-mentioned conversation, some of the participants' perspectives on the psychological element or dimension of learner autonomy they encountered while planning and completing their portfolio assessment were expressed. While participating in this form of examination, these participants did feel the three sub aspects (motivational, affective, and metacognitive) of this psychological element of autonomy. Due to the small sample size of only two participants, the results of the pilot research interaction should not be extended. In addition, the results are limited to responses collected through a face-to-face interview, with no additional data from the document (portfolio) or an observation session. Furthermore, the results are exclusively from the students' point of view. Data from the teacher's perspective should also be acquired to obtain a more thorough perspective.

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