



PORTFOLIO-BASED EVALUATION AS A CATALYST FOR IMPROVING ARABIC WRITING INSTRUCTION AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation in Arabic writing instruction (*maharah al-kitābah*) at MTs Sunan Kalijaga, Kranding, Mojo, Kediri, as part of efforts to promote learner-centered and reflective pedagogy aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were obtained through classroom observation, interviews, and analysis of students' portfolios consisting of drafts, revisions, and reflections. The findings reveal that portfolio assessment enhances students' motivation and engagement by allowing them to track their progress and take responsibility for their learning. It also improves writing proficiency, particularly in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary use, and coherence, through iterative feedback and reflection. Moreover, the approach enables differentiated instruction, where tasks are adapted to students' varying abilities, and strengthens pedagogical relationships between teachers and students through constructive feedback and collaboration. However, several challenges were identified, including time constraints, limited teacher readiness in designing comprehensive rubrics, students' lack of reflective habits, and inadequate digital infrastructure.

Keywords: *Arabic Learning; Education 5.0; Portfolio-based evaluation; Reflective learning; Writing skills*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the core subjects in the madrasah education curriculum, playing a strategic role in shaping students' communicative competence and Islamic understanding (Zakiyah, 2024). In Arabic language learning, there are four essential skills that must be developed in a balanced manner: *maharah al-istima'* (listening),

maharah al-kalam (speaking), *maharah al-qira'ah* (reading), and *maharah al-kitābah* (writing) (Taubah, 2019). These four skills complement one another and form the foundation for comprehensive language mastery (Aziza & Muliansyah, 2020). However, in actual classroom practice, the writing skill (*maharah al-kitābah*) often emerges as the weakest among the four, since writing requires not only linguistic proficiency but also complex cognitive abilities (Izzah & Hafidz, 2024; Khairani et al., 2024; Munawarah & Zulkifli, 2021; S. P. Nasution et al., 2025).

Writing in Arabic is not merely a mechanical activity of composing sentences; rather, it is a cognitive process that involves organizing ideas, constructing arguments, and applying grammatical rules accurately (Z. M. Nasution et al., 2023). In other words, writing represents a higher-order thinking process that plays a vital role in developing students' critical, reflective, and creative thinking skills. Nevertheless, several studies indicate that the teaching of *maharah al-kitābah* in Islamic educational institutions still faces various challenges, such as limited practice time, insufficient teacher feedback during the writing process, and assessment methods that are overly product-oriented (Hatami & Amrulloh, 2025; Putri & Impiana, 2025). Consequently, many students still struggle to produce Arabic texts that are structured, logical, and communicative (Aprilia et al., 2024; Lubis et al., 2025).

In response to these challenges, traditional evaluation approaches that assess only the final written product are considered insufficient in providing a holistic picture of students' writing development (Huseynova, 2024). This limitation has prompted the emergence of studies exploring forms of authentic assessment, one of which is portfolio assessment. Portfolio-based evaluation is viewed as an assessment strategy that emphasizes learning processes, self-reflection, and continuous improvement (Setiawati et al., 2024). Through portfolios, teachers can assess students' work based on the process of composition, revision, and enhancement over a given period. This approach encourages active learner participation, strengthens responsibility for one's own work, and enhances metacognitive awareness of the writing process (Gencel, 2017).

Previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in second language learning. For instance, Makfiro et al., (2024) found that portfolio evaluation significantly improved students' motivation and engagement in writing activities. Similarly, Abdurahim-Salain (2024) confirmed that portfolio implementation fosters critical thinking and reflective awareness among learners. In the context of foreign language instruction, Mahmud et al., (2025) revealed that portfolios play an essential role in developing writing proficiency through reflection and iterative revision. However, most of these studies focus on English or other foreign languages rather than Arabic.

The research gap lies in the limited number of empirical studies that examine in depth the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation in *maharah al-kitābah*

instruction within Indonesian Islamic educational settings, particularly at the madrasah level. Few studies have investigated how the portfolio mechanism can systematically enhance students' Arabic writing abilities, as well as how teachers and students respond to this evaluation model in real classroom contexts. Furthermore, there is a lack of studies exploring the challenges of implementation and the adaptive strategies required for integrating portfolio-based assessment into Arabic language teaching as a foreign language.

In addition to enriching the evaluative dimension, the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation aligns with the paradigm of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes active, reflective, and competency-based education (Zhang & Tur, 2022). Within the framework of Education 5.0, teachers act not only as evaluators of learning outcomes but also as facilitators of students' thinking and reflection processes (Mupaikwa, 2025). Through portfolio assessment, students are encouraged to engage in project-based learning, evaluate their own progress, and integrate both collaborative values and personal responsibility (Ma'arif & Rosikh, 2025). This approach also supports the concepts of learner autonomy and lifelong learning, which form the cornerstone of modern education.

However, the implementation of this model still encounters several challenges in practice, including limited teacher understanding of portfolio assessment principles, time constraints, and the lack of digital infrastructure to support portfolio collection and reflection (Nurjanah et al., 2025). Therefore, a more contextualized study is needed to explore how portfolio-based evaluation strategies can be adapted to the characteristics of Arabic language instruction in madrasahs, including how teachers and students can optimize their roles in the process.

Based on this background and the identified research gap, this study aims to explore the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation in maharah al-kitābah instruction in madrasahs, to assess its effectiveness in improving students' writing skills, and to identify the challenges and opportunities that arise during its implementation. Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on authentic assessment in the context of Arabic as a foreign language education. Practically, the findings are expected to offer valuable insights for developing more meaningful, reflective, and outcome-oriented evaluation strategies in Arabic language instruction within Islamic educational institutions.

MTs Sunan Kalijaga Kediri, as one of the Islamic secondary education institutions, has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the quality of Arabic language instruction, particularly in enhancing students' writing competence. At the eighth-grade level, where students already possess a stronger linguistic foundation, implementing portfolio assessment becomes highly relevant. However, its application is not without challenges, including teacher readiness, students' understanding of the portfolio concept, time constraints, and limited supporting facilities.

Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate the implementation of portfolio assessment in maharah al-kitābah instruction, its effectiveness in enhancing students' writing performance, and the obstacles encountered during the process. The findings are expected to provide a meaningful contribution to the development of more reflective and impactful Arabic language assessment strategies that directly support the improvement of students' writing competence.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method aimed at describing the implementation of portfolio-based assessment in developing maharah al-kitābah (writing skills) among eighth-grade students at MTs Sunan Kalijaga. The research focused on students' worksheets as the main assessment instrument, as well as interviews conducted with teachers and students. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the process of portfolio assessment in the classroom, while interviews were used to explore in-depth information regarding the implementation process, challenges encountered, and students' responses toward Arabic writing learning. Documentation was used to collect evidence of students' written works that formed part of the portfolio. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques through the process of identifying patterns and themes related to the implementation of portfolio assessment in developing writing skills. The study aimed to identify the implementation of portfolio assessment, its supporting and inhibiting factors, and its impact on improving the writing ability of eighth-grade students at MTs Sunan Kalijaga.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Pedagogical Foundations of Portfolio-Based Evaluation in Arabic Writing Instruction

Portfolio-based evaluation is rooted in the paradigm of constructivist pedagogy, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed by learners through experience, reflection, and direct engagement in the learning process (Arifuddin et al., 2022). In the context of Arabic language learning, particularly in writing skills (*maharah al-kitābah*), this approach plays a crucial role in shifting the focus of instruction from merely assessing the final written product to understanding the thinking process and the continuous development of learners' linguistic abilities. Writing in Arabic requires not only mastery of complex morphological and syntactic structures but also rhetorical and semantic skills to express ideas accurately (Zaid et al., 2024). Therefore, a pedagogical approach that assesses students' cognitive processes, revisions, and reflections is essential—and this is where the strength of portfolio assessment lies.

Theoretically, portfolio assessment aligns with the principles of process-oriented writing pedagogy, which views writing as a process rather than a final product (Dewi, 2025). Within this approach, students are guided through the stages of pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing, where each stage reflects the progressive development of writing skills that can be documented through portfolios. Portfolios allow teachers to evaluate how students build ideas, correct linguistic errors, and deepen their written expression. In the context of Arabic language learning, a study by Al-Hawamdeh et al., (2023) revealed that the process-based approach significantly improves students' writing fluency, accuracy, and complexity compared to traditional product-based evaluation.

Portfolio evaluation provides space for students to demonstrate their learning achievements through tangible evidence such as writing drafts, revision notes, reflection journals, and self-assessments (Balqis, 2022). This is in line with the learner-centered education paradigm of Education 5.0, in which students act as active participants capable of directing, evaluating, and improving their own learning processes.

From a psychopedagogical perspective, portfolio assessment is also supported by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering learning motivation (Magdalena et al., 2023). Through portfolios, students gain a sense of control over their learning outcomes (autonomy), receive meaningful feedback from teachers (competence), and engage in collaborative interactions through writing discussions (relatedness). In the context of Arabic as a foreign language, portfolio implementation has been shown to foster reflective awareness and personal responsibility among students to enhance the quality of their writing.

Empirically, numerous studies support the pedagogical foundation of portfolio-based assessment. Research by Sulistyio et al., (2020) showed that applying portfolio assessment in English writing instruction improved students' writing performance and fostered positive attitudes and engagement in learning. Furthermore, a study by Esternon & Diva (2024) found that portfolio evaluation significantly contributed to improving grammatical accuracy and text organization compared to traditional assessments. Meanwhile, Wu (2023) found that using e-portfolios in writing classes made students more reflective, capable of reviewing their writing progress chronologically, and more confident in their linguistic abilities. These findings affirm that portfolio-based evaluation functions not only as an assessment tool but also as a reflective learning strategy consistent with constructivist pedagogy.

Thus, the pedagogical foundation of portfolio-based evaluation in Arabic writing instruction can be summarized in three main pillars:

- a. Cognitive constructivism, which emphasizes active and reflective learning.

- b. Process-oriented writing pedagogy, which views writing as an ongoing activity involving revision and idea development.
 - c. Authentic and learner-centered assessment, which allows students to demonstrate their linguistic and cognitive competencies through real evidence.
- Together, these pillars establish the conceptual foundation that portfolio assessment is not merely an evaluation technique but a pedagogical strategy capable of integrating assessment, learning, and reflection within a meaningful learning cycle. In the context of Arabic language instruction, this approach not only enhances writing proficiency but also cultivates students' metacognitive awareness of their language learning processes, a vital competency for achieving 21st-century education goals oriented toward lifelong learning and self-directed education.

Implementation Strategies for Portfolio-Based Evaluation in Arabic Language Classrooms

This study on portfolio-based evaluation in Arabic language learning was conducted at MTs Sunan Kalijaga, Kranding, Mojo, Kediri during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The research subjects were eighth-grade students who already possessed sufficient linguistic foundation to develop their writing skills (*maharah al-kitābah*). The implementation of portfolio assessment was carried out in stages to reflect the pedagogical principles of process-oriented writing and authentic assessment. In general, the implementation strategy consisted of five main stages: (1) planning, (2) writing instruction, (3) portfolio collection and reflection, (4) rubric-based evaluation, and (5) feedback and follow-up learning.

Planning and Preparation Stage

The planning stage began with curriculum analysis and identification of students' learning needs. The Arabic language teacher determined learning objectives aligned with the competency goals of the Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in developing *maharah al-kitābah*. The selected learning theme was "*al-Riyāḍah*" (sports), chosen for its relevance to students' daily lives and its potential for thematic vocabulary exploration.

Before implementing portfolio assessment, the teacher also considered students' proficiency levels based on diagnostic assessments. MTs Sunan Kalijaga grouped students according to ability levels; therefore, the form and complexity of portfolios were adjusted to each group's characteristics. This approach aligns with the principle of differentiated instruction in the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes adapting instructional strategies to meet students' needs, interests, and abilities (Dinana et al., 2024).

In addition, the teacher prepared a scoring rubric to serve as an objective guide for evaluating both the process and the outcome of students' writing. The rubric included four main dimensions: accuracy (grammatical correctness),

vocabulary use (thematic word choice), coherence and organization (logical flow of ideas), and content relevance (alignment with the theme). Using the rubric from the beginning helped both teacher and students understand performance standards and clarify the direction of learning reflection.

Writing Instruction Stage

This stage served as the core of portfolio implementation. The teacher began by explaining learning objectives and performance indicators, followed by introducing the thematic material through *qirā'ah* (reading) and *kalām* (speaking) activities (Arifuddin et al., 2025). After mastering relevant vocabulary and sentence patterns, students were instructed to write a short paragraph on the topic of sports, ensuring grammatical accuracy. To foster collaboration and creativity, students were divided into four small groups, each consisting of five members. Each group was given 15 minutes to discuss ideas, organize paragraphs, and select appropriate vocabulary. The teacher acted as a facilitator, monitoring group discussions, providing linguistic guidance, and recording individual progress.

Observations revealed that the most common errors occurred in the use of *damīr* (pronouns) and *mufradāt* (vocabulary selection). Consequently, the teacher provided a mini-lesson on *fi'l māḍī*, *fi'l muḍārī'*, and subject-pronoun agreement. This stage illustrates that portfolios serve not only as an assessment tool but also as a pedagogical intervention to correct errors and reinforce linguistic understanding through direct instruction (Adriantoni et al., 2025).

Portfolio Collection and Reflection Stage

After the writing activities, students submitted their work as part of their individual portfolios. Each portfolio included:

- a. The initial draft,
- b. The revised version based on teacher feedback,
- c. A self-reflection note on the writing process, and
- d. Evidence of collaboration (group discussions or peer revisions).

The teacher instructed students to write a short reflection on the difficulties they encountered, the strategies they used, and what they learned during the writing process. This reflective activity was essential in strengthening students' metacognitive awareness of their writing development (Khezrinejad et al., 2024). By integrating reflection into the portfolio, students were assessed not only on the final product but also on their thinking processes and self-improvement abilities. This approach aligns with authentic assessment, which evaluates student performance in meaningful, real-world learning contexts.

Rubric-Based Evaluation Stage

The teacher evaluated students' portfolios using a standardized rubric developed during the planning stage. Each aspect of assessment carried a specific weight—for example: grammatical accuracy (30%), vocabulary use (25%), coherence and organization (25%), and content relevance (20%). The rubric served not only as an evaluation instrument but also as a learning tool, helping students understand expected performance standards. The teacher recorded each student's progress periodically in a portfolio assessment journal, serving as documentation of writing skill development over time. In addition to scoring, the teacher conducted qualitative analysis of portfolio contents to identify common error patterns, linguistic improvement, and writing style development. The results of this analysis became the basis for designing targeted instructional improvements for subsequent lessons.

Feedback and Follow-Up Stage

The final stage involved providing formative and reflective feedback. The teacher offered both written and oral comments addressing the strengths and weaknesses of students' writing. Feedback was given using the constructive feedback principle—guiding students to understand their errors rather than merely pointing them out. Furthermore, the teacher provided positive reinforcement by appreciating strong aspects such as vocabulary choice, idea coherence, and creativity. A follow-up session was then held, where students revised their writing based on the received feedback. This revision task formed an integral part of the portfolio cycle, fostering a habit of reflection and continuous learning.

Overall, the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation at MTs Sunan Kalijaga demonstrated a holistic and contextualized application, encompassing students' cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspects. This strategy successfully integrated the learning and evaluation processes simultaneously, making students more active, reflective, and responsible for their learning outcomes. The implementation aligns with the learner-centered education principle within Education 5.0, where teachers function not merely as evaluators but as facilitators of learning development. Thus, the portfolio serves not only as a measurement tool for writing ability but also as a medium for developing autonomous, reflective, and lifelong learners.

The Impact of Portfolio-Based Evaluation on Writing Proficiency and Learning Engagement

Based on observations and interviews with teachers and students, the implementation of portfolio-based evaluation has a significant impact on both the learning process and students' outcomes, particularly in Arabic writing skills (*maharah al-kitābah*). These effects can be explained through several key dimensions as follows:

1. *Enhancing Students' Motivation and Engagement*

Interviews with several students revealed that most of them felt more enthusiastic about writing because their work was evaluated gradually and stored as a record of progress. One student mentioned, "*saya merasa lebih termotivasi karena bisa melihat tulisan saya yang dulu dan sekarang lebih baik*" which means I feel more motivated because I can see how my writing has improved compared to before. This indicates that portfolios serve not only as an evaluation tool but also as a medium for self-reflection, fostering learning awareness and responsibility toward the learning process.

2. *Strengthening Writing Skills and Understanding of Language Structure*

Classroom observations showed an improvement in students' ability to construct more structured sentences after teachers consistently provided feedback on their portfolio assignments. The most frequent errors were related to the use of *dhamir* and the selection of appropriate *mufradat*. The teacher then provided additional explanations on *fi'l māḍī* and *fi'l muḍāri'*, helping students understand the relationship between verbs and subjects in Arabic sentences. After several portfolio assignment cycles, these errors began to decrease, and students' writing became more cohesive.

3. *Promoting Differentiated Learning Practices*

According to teacher interviews, the portfolio strategy enables the application of differentiated learning principles as emphasized in the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum). Teachers adjust portfolio tasks based on the students' abilities and needs in each class. For instance, in lower-level classes, teachers provide example sentences and basic vocabulary, whereas in higher-level classes, students are asked to develop paragraphs using their own ideas. This approach reflects flexibility and fairness in assessment, allowing each student to progress according to their potential.

4. *Building Reflective Pedagogical Relationships between Teachers and Students*

Through portfolio evaluation, the interaction between teachers and students becomes more meaningful and reflective. Observations showed that teachers acted not only as evaluators but also as mentors and reflection partners. When giving feedback, teachers provided specific comments such as, "This sentence is good but needs improvement in the use of *dhamir*," or "The vocabulary is appropriate, try adding a connector to make it more coherent." This practice fosters a collaborative learning atmosphere and supports the continuous development of writing competence.

Challenges and Future Directions in Applying Portfolio Assessment to Arabic Writing Instruction

Although the implementation of portfolio assessment has proven effective in improving Arabic writing skills and motivating students to learn independently, this

study also identified several challenges that require serious attention. Based on observations and interviews with teachers and students, these challenges include issues related to time, teacher readiness, student learning habits, and the availability of supporting facilities. Nevertheless, these challenges also open up opportunities for future innovation and development in portfolio-based evaluation practices.

1. *Time and Workload Constraints*

According to interviews with Arabic language teachers, one of the main obstacles in implementing portfolio assessment is the limitation of time. The process of collecting, reviewing, and providing feedback on students' work requires considerable time. Teachers must evaluate each piece of writing carefully, considering aspects such as structure, vocabulary (*mufradat*), and sentence cohesion, which differ significantly from conventional written tests. As a result, teachers often face additional workloads, especially when handling large classes. In the future, integrating digital technology such as e-portfolios may offer a solution to streamline assessment and documentation processes without compromising quality.

2. *Limited Teacher Readiness and Assessment Literacy*

Observations and interviews revealed that some teachers still need training in designing comprehensive and objective assessment rubrics. Several teachers tend to assess writing holistically without clear indicators, leading to evaluation results that do not fully reflect students' writing competence. This highlights the importance of enhancing teachers' assessment literacy through professional development programs or workshops focused on rubric design, formative feedback, and reflective strategies within portfolio-based assessment.

3. *Student Habits and Self-Reflection Challenges*

From the students' perspective, the main challenge lies in the lack of reflective habits in the learning process. Interviews indicated that some students still view portfolio tasks as administrative requirements rather than opportunities for self-evaluation and improvement. Many are not yet accustomed to rereading their own work or revising it based on teachers' feedback. To address this issue, instructional strategies that promote metacognitive awareness are needed — for example, through weekly reflection sessions or group discussions where students analyze and discuss their own portfolio progress.

4. *Infrastructure and Resource Limitations*

The lack of facilities and resources also hinders the optimal implementation of portfolio assessment. Observations showed that many students still write manually without digital tools, making storage and progress tracking difficult. In the future, the use of digital portfolio platforms such as Google Classroom, Padlet, or internal madrasah e-learning systems can facilitate teachers and students in archiving works, providing direct comments, and systematically tracking language development.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that portfolio-based evaluation has a solid pedagogical foundation in the teaching of maharah al-kitābah (Arabic writing skills), grounded in the constructivist paradigm that views learning as an active and reflective process. Within this approach, writing is no longer perceived merely as a final product but as a continuous cognitive and reflective process. The portfolio allows students to monitor their linguistic and rhetorical development while providing teachers with a more authentic representation of learners' progress. Hence, the portfolio functions not only as an assessment tool but also as a learning instrument that cultivates metacognitive awareness, intrinsic motivation, and learner autonomy—principles that align with learner-centered education in the era of Education 5.0.

In terms of implementation, the study found that portfolio-based evaluation at MTs Sunan Kalijaga was carried out systematically through five stages: planning, writing instruction, portfolio collection and reflection, rubric-based assessment, and formative feedback. This strategy effectively integrates the principles of process-oriented writing pedagogy and authentic assessment. The teacher acts as a facilitator who adapts writing activities according to students' proficiency levels, consistent with the differentiated instruction principle embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum. Through cycles of reflection and revision, students learn to evaluate their own thinking processes and correct errors independently, making writing not only a linguistic activity but also a medium for cognitive, linguistic, and affective development.

The findings also demonstrate the positive effects of portfolio implementation on students' writing competence and engagement. Portfolios enhance intrinsic motivation as students can trace their progress chronologically, strengthen their writing through revision-feedback cycles, and foster a reflective pedagogical relationship between teacher and student. Furthermore, the approach supports equitable and contextualized differentiated learning, allowing each student to grow according to their potential. Nevertheless, the successful use of portfolios requires teachers' commitment to provide consistent and constructive feedback to ensure that the reflective and collaborative benefits of the approach are fully realized.

Despite these benefits, the study also identified several challenges that need to be addressed for optimal portfolio implementation. Limited instructional time, teachers' readiness in designing authentic assessments, students' low reflective habits, and infrastructure constraints remain major obstacles. Future improvements should include assessment literacy training for teachers and the integration of digital technology through e-portfolios as a strategic solution. With

supportive educational policies that promote pedagogical innovation, portfolio-based evaluation holds great potential to serve as an authentic assessment model that not only measures learning outcomes but also shapes autonomous, reflective, and lifelong learners of Arabic.

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