

Reflection Processes among Student Teachers of English Using the J-POSTL Portfolio

Junko Negishi

Tsurumi University

negishi-j@tsurumi-u.ac.jp

Abstract

This paper reports on a reflection process among university students who belonged to a teacher-training course for English. Nine students participated in the study by evaluating themselves using the Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (J-POSTL), a reflection tool that supports students' autonomous progress. The participants evaluated themselves four times over 16 months on 64 questions (can-do statements) using a five-point scale. The average score was 1.90 at the beginning and 3.45 at the end. The results suggest that the participants gradually and steadily learned English education methodology and realized they could improve through practice teaching and by attending class. However, the participants commented that maintaining a good relationship with students was important for conducting a good teaching class.

Keywords

English teacher education, Portfolio, Reflection

1 Background

1.1 EPOSTL and J-POSTL for reflection

Reflection is considered an effective process for teacher education. A portfolio can be a reflection tool that supports students' autonomous progress. J-POSTL was adapted from the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) (Newby et al., 2007) based on the Japanese educational context (JACET SIG on English Language Education, 2014). This study used the J-POSTL for preservice English teacher education.

1.2 Previous research

Ingvarsdóttir (2011) studied the effectiveness of EPOSTL for postgraduate student teachers and found it helped them recognize their strengths and weaknesses and understand the relationship between knowledge and practical skills.

Takagi (2015) studied the reflection processes of student teachers in English education for two semesters. The students realized their abilities had developed and their knowledge had increased. Takagi also noted that J-POSTL is new in Japanese English education and research on it is scarce. Thus, the present study aimed to understand what students at Tsurumi University learned and were able to do through self-reflection using J-POSTL.

2 Procedure

This study used an old (2013) version of J-POSTL since students have used it every year, which enabled me to compare results. J-POSTL has three sections: 1) personal statement, 2) self-assessment, and 3) dossier. This paper reports on the first two. The first (personal statement) included nine participants' additional comments after finishing their student-teaching experiences. The comments were coded and analyzed through theme analysis. The second section (self-assessment) will be described first below. Some can-do statements that are not included in the new version and are for novice in-service teachers were excluded. As a result, there were 64 can-do statements in seven categories, and the participants answered using a five-point scale as shown below.



They evaluated themselves four times over 16 months: 1) when they started a third-year class called "English Teaching Methods II," 2) at the end of the spring semester, 3) at the end of the fall semester, and 4) after finishing three weeks of practice teaching in the early summer of the following year when they were seniors. The seven categories were as follows: I. Context (15 items), II. Methodology (15), III. Resources (6), IV. Lesson Planning (16), V. Conducting a Lesson (10), VI. Independent Learning (0), and VII. Assessment (2).

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Average self-assessment scores

The average scores on 64 items were 1.90, 2.30, 2.91, and 3.45 for the first to fourth evaluations, respectively.

The lowest initial value, 1.20, was found in “D. Institutional Resources and Constraints” in the category “I. Context.” It could have been difficult for the participants to imagine what kinds of resources they could use, leading to very low scores. After their practice teaching, however, the score jumped to 3.7, most likely because they could see the actual situations in their schools.

Regarding the higher scores, “A. Curriculum” in the category “I. Context” began on top at 3.7 and ended at 4.2. The participants seemed to be confident about the national course of study.

3.2 Rate of increase in the average scores

The average rates of increase were 1.23 from the first to second evaluation, 1.27 from second to third, 1.20 from third to fourth, and 1.87 from first to fourth. The item showing the lowest rate of increase was “A. Curriculum” in the category “I. Context.” This was because the initial value was very high and there was no room for increase. The item showing the highest rate of increase was “D. Institutional Resources and Constraints” in the category “I. Context.” As described above, the initial value was very low but jumped up after the practice teaching.

3.3 Individual development

Figures 1 and 2 show the development in the average scores of participants C and E from the first to the fourth evaluations. Participant C developed gradually, and seven of the nine students showed similar development. Presumably, their practice teaching worked well, and they became confident in understanding the self-assessment statements and in their teaching. By contrast, participant E showed development while taking the class, but his scores dropped after the practice teaching. Participant E and one other actually received low evaluations from teachers at their practice teaching schools. Their scores never surpassed 3.0, which is lower than the scores of the other students.

Figures 3 and 4 show the rates of increase for participants D and E between the first and second, second and third, and third and fourth evaluations. Figure 3 shows that D developed well in the practice teaching, and three of the nine students developed similarly. By contrast, six students had decreasing rates of increase, as shown in Figure 4. Specifically, two participants, who showed a Figure 2-type fall, did not seem to achieve good progress.

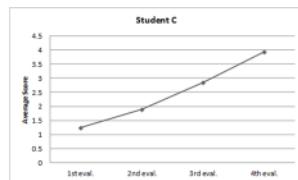


Figure 1 Average scores of student C

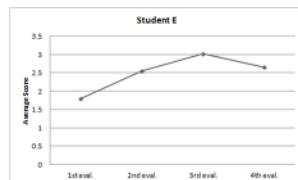


Figure 2 Average scores of student E

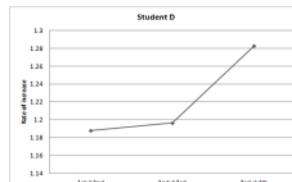


Figure 3 Rate of increase in student D's scores

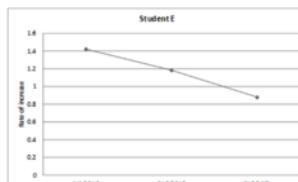


Figure 4 Rate of increase in student E's scores

3.4 Comments on the “personal statement”

Many students said their teaching went better than expected because they could establish good relations with their students through everyday school life and club activities. Their comments suggest that teaching is not learned solely through obtaining higher scores in their knowledge of language, methodology, and curricula but also through human-to-human relationships.

They also commented on J-POSTL itself. One wrote, “I can remember the first day by looking at the portfolio, and I can visualize how I developed, which is a good aspect of the portfolio.” Some students exchanged their J-POSTLs, read each other’s comments, shared their anxieties, and provided mutual support. They felt that writing the comments was too much work; however, when they looked back, they felt it was very effective.

References

- Ingvarsdóttir, H. (2011). The EPOSTL in Iceland: Getting the mentors on board. In D. Newby, A-B. Fenner, & B. Jones (eds.), *Using the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages* (pp. 63-70). Strasbourg/Graz, Council of Europe Publishing.
- JACET SIG on English Language Education (2014). *Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages [For Preservice English-Teacher Education]*.
- Newby, D., Allan, R., Fenner, A-B., Jones, B., Komorowska, H., & Soghikyan, K. (2007). *The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages: A Reflection Tool for Language Teacher Education*. Graz/Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Takagi, A. (2015). Reflection in preservice teacher education: Using the Japanese Portfolio for Student Teachers of Language (J-POSTL) *Language Teacher Education* 2 (2), 59-80.