Part A: Introduction

1. Rationale

The conceptual framework guiding the development of curriculum and instruction practices in the English as a second language (ESL) classroom has undergone significant modification during the last fifteen years. This shift in pedagogical theory has resulted in the increasing use of student-centered communicative approaches in the classroom. These approaches include process writing, process reading, communicative competence, and whole language (Goodman, 1989; Heymsfeld, 1989; Shanklin & Rhodes, 1989, in Moya, S. & O'Malley, J. M, 1994) and are distinguished by their focus on language functions and meaning and the processes of learning.

However, proponents of process-oriented curricula and instruction claim that traditional assessment techniques are often incompatible with current ESL classroom practices. Studies by experts like Brandt, 1989, Shepard, 1989, Rothman, 1990b, and Wiggins, 1989b concluded that standardized testing is seen as particularly irrelevant to process learning (Moya, S. & O'Malley, J. M, 1994). Because of the incompatibility of process learning and product assessment, educators have begun to explore alternative forms of student assessment.


Despite the significance of portfolio assessment in the development of curriculum and instructions, research on this area has been surprisingly scarce. Also, in the division where I work – Language Skills Division II, Department of English - American Language and Cultures (DEALC), this method has not yet been applied officially and systematically in evaluating the reading skills of the second year students.
For the above two reasons, one is the general current trend in ESL classrooms, and the other is the specific existing situation in my division, the following experimental study was conducted in response to such problems: “A study on the application of portfolio assessment in teaching reading to 2nd year students at Department of English - American Languages and Cultures, College of Foreign Languages, Vietnam National University, Hanoi”, which can be translated into Vietnamese as stated in the thesis title.

2. Objectives and scope

2.1. Objectives

This experimental research was designed with an intention of evaluating the effectiveness of adopting portfolios as a new assessment instrument in teaching reading skills to second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. Specifically, the study has two objectives. First, it aims at examining the level of effectiveness that portfolio assessment has on students’ reading proficiency. Secondly, it is to investigate students’ reading progress after the experiment, as perceived by students themselves.

2.2. Research questions

With those objectives above, the study aimed at answering the following questions.

1. What is the relation between the portfolio assessment experimental project and students’ reading skills?
2. What is the progress, if any, as perceived by the students, in developing their reading skills?

2.3. Scope

As its title suggests, the focus of this study was only on second year students who were English majors. Particularly, the subjects were limited to only 25 students from a class at DEALC. In addition, within a range of alternative assessment instruments, the study examined the effectiveness of only one type i.e., portfolio assessment. Finally, due to time constraints,
the thesis targeted only at the application of portfolio assessment in the reading skill, not the other three skills as a whole.

3. Methodology

3.1. A quantitative and qualitative research

This research was realized with regard to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. As stated earlier, the objective of the study is to examine the impact of portfolios assessment on students’ reading skills. In order to measure this causal relationship, an experimental research was conducted. Since it was not possible for the researcher to carry out a true experiment due to the impossibility of randomly assigning subjects into experimental and control groups, this study was carried out as a pre-experimental research. It was a pre-test post-test design with the purpose of comparing a set of pre-test scores with post-test scores gained by the participants before and after the experiment. This comparison was done quantitatively by using a kind of t-test.

On the other hand, qualitative analysis is also applied in achieving the second purpose of the study: examining students’ learning progress as perceived by themselves. With this objective, the researcher would study carefully students’ verbal reports, which were reflected in their weekly logs.

3.2. Selection of participants

The population for this experiment is second year students at the DEALC, CFL, VNU. From this population, a sample of 25 students was taken. They were members of the group to which the researcher was in charge of teaching reading skills. The selected students made the participants of the experimental study.

3.3. Methods of data collection

In order to collect sufficient data for analysis, the following methods were employed. The first was consulting Reading 2, the reading textbook used by the second year students at DEALC,
to find out the targeted reading skills to be acquired after the experimental semester. Testing was a second method, which encompassed a pre-test and a post-test aiming at evaluating students’ reading proficiency before and after the treatment (the application of portfolio assessment in their reading lessons over a 15 week semester). Finally, students’ reading portfolios served as a rich source from which data concerning students’ progress after this experiment could be collected.

3.4. Data analysis
The data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. First, in terms of quantitative analysis, a statistical inference approach was employed. In particular, a t-test for dependent means was applied. It is a commonly used inferential test of the significance of the difference between two sets of scores gained by the same group (Salkind, 2006). In other words, the researcher used this type of t-test to find out the degree to which the two sets of scores (pre-test and post-test) were related.

Qualitative analysis was another approach that played an important role in the interpretation of data gathered from student verbal reports in their weekly logs. This type of data would; therefore, provide answers to the question of how much students would progress after the study, as perceived by themselves.

4. Design
The thesis is organized into three parts. Part one is the introduction, which provides background to the research, the objectives, scope, as well as the methodology applied in the realization of the research.

Part two, investigation, is the main part, in which four chapters are included. Chapter 1 is a review of literature which is relevant to reading, assessment and portfolio assessment. Specifically, it deals with a definition of reading, reading skills, followed by a definition of assessment and its types. Chapter 1 ends with a theoretical background on portfolio
assessment including definition, rationale for using portfolio assessment in ESL, characteristics of a model portfolio assessment and procedures in applying portfolio assessment. Methodology is the main focus of chapter 2, the study. This chapter describes some background to the study and procedures for carrying out the experimental research, including instruments for data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 is the presentation and discussion of the findings from the study. After a report of the results comes the discussion of such data, which, finally, is followed by re-examining the research questions stated in part one. Chapter 4, the last chapter of part two, offers some implications and suggestions for using portfolio assessment in teaching the reading skill to students.

*Part three*, the last part, summarizes the whole thesis under the main points and offers recommendations for further research. Finally, references, glossary, and some appendices are provided at the end of the paper to make it easy for readers to follow the research.
Part B: Development

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Definition of Reading

Reading has been the subject of research study for over a century (Cheng, 1985). The issue of defining reading is not an easy task, and it varies according to researchers. In the simplest sense, reading is “essentially concerned with meaning, specifically with the transfer of meaning from mind to mind: the transfer of a message from writer to reader” (Nuttall, 2000: 3). Anderson’s definition (1990) has some point in common: “Reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and the reading material in building meaning.” From these definitions, it can be understood that reading is mainly to do with meaning and working out the intended meaning from a reading text.

Aebersold and Field (1997) and McShane (2005) provide more detailed and interactive definitions of reading, which are similar in terms of the factors involved in reading. According to them, reading entails three elements: the reader, the text, and the interaction between the reader and the text.

*The reader:* readers’ engagement in the reading process is based on their past experience, both in learning how to read and in the ways reading fits into their lives.

*The text:* Although for many people reading texts means reading books, people read many different types of texts everyday, such as labels (on boxes, medicine containers, clothes), instructions (road signs, manuals), advertisements (on TV, in magazines, on bulletins), and notes (shopping lists, messages), to name only a few. Text can be anything from a few words, to one sentence, to thousands of words comprising thousands of sentences. Text is also broadly defined to include any printed text or electronic text (McShane, 2005: 5).
Interaction between reader and text: there are three ways readers can interact with a text. Interaction between purpose and manner of reading: the purpose of reading decides reading behavior. Interaction through reading strategies: when reading a text, readers often use mental activities to construct meaning from a text. These activities are generally referred to as reading strategies, although they are sometimes called reading skills. Interaction through schema: schema refers to knowledge readers bring to a text.

This commonly cited definition of reading suggests what we should remember is that text does not have "meaning" of itself, but that this meaning is "created in the interaction between a reader and a text"; presumably, the reader's use of reading strategies is part of this creation of meaning.

In general, reading is a process of transferring meaning from writer to reader. It takes three elements for the occurrence of this process: the reader, the text, and the interaction between these two factors. When reading a text, the reader often has a specific purpose, and this purpose decides the reading strategies and knowledge that the reader brings to the reading process. Most of all “reading means reading and understanding” (Ur, 1996: 138).

1.2. Reasons for Reading

According to Grellet (1981), there are two main reasons for reading: reading for pleasure, and reading for information (in order to find out something or order to do something with the information you get). Reading poetries, mysteries, and comic books provides entertainment while reading non-fiction books like science or nature stories certainly brings readers a great amount of information.

McShane (2005) provides a more detailed list on different reading purposes.

- To learn about something (as in reading an interesting newspaper or magazine article)
- To research a subject or study for a test
- To be entertained
- To learn how to do something (as in directions)
- To find specific information (as in looking for the due date on a bill, finding details on the charges on a doctor’s statement, or checking the TV listings) (p.72)

In language classes, learners may read to learn chunks of language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and expressions. Readers may also read to understand more about the culture of the countries speaking their target language.

Obviously, readers may take different approaches for different purposes: reading for information or reading for fun. However, even when reading is for pleasure, understanding is important. If we do not get it, it is not very pleasurable! Therefore, comprehension is the goal.

### 1.3. Reading Skills for Comprehension

A great deal of research effort has tried to identify a catalogue of reading skills and establish their relationship with one another, but the issues remain controversial. In any case, it is generally agreed that, if individual skills exist, they work together and are inextricably linked (Nuttall, 2000).

In such a fashion, many different lists and taxonomies of skills have been developed. Neil Anderson (2000) mentions some reading skills he thinks readers “typically need to develop”. They are understanding main ideas, making inferences, predicting outcomes, and guessing vocabulary from context.

Davis, cited in Alderson (2000), identifies eight skills as follows:

- recalling word meaning
- drawing inferences about the meaning of a word in context
- finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase
- weaving together ideas in the content
- drawing inferences from the content
- recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude; tone and mood
- identifying a writer's technique
- following the structure of a passage

It is not hard to recognize that all of the skills are strongly associated with working out the meanings, whether explicitly or implicitly stated in the text. Besides, understanding the organization of a text and the writer’s purpose and tone is also important for comprehension.

Also focusing on the issue of reading skills in second-language education, Munby (1978) offers a very detailed and clear-cut list by distinguishing the following reading 'microskills', which have been very influential in syllabus and materials design as well as language tests design.

- recognizing the script of a language
- deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
- understanding explicitly stated information
- understanding information, when not explicitly stated
- understanding conceptual meaning
- understanding the communicative value of sentences
- understanding relations within the sentence.
- understanding relations between parts of text through lexical cohesion devices
- understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- interpreting text by going outside it
- recognizing indicators in discourse
- identifying the main point or important information in discourse
- distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
- extracting salient details to summaries (the text, an idea)
- extracting relevant paints from a text selectively
- using basic reference skills
- skimming
- scanning to locate specifically required information
- transcribing information to diagrammatic display

Judging Munby’s taxonomy of reading skills, Alderson (2000) cites in his book some drawbacks of this list. First, it is based more on theories and lacks empirical data to support it. Second, these skills give a misleading impression of being discrete when in fact they overlap enormously. Third, it is almost impossible to isolate what skills are operationalised by what test items, and that analysis of test performance does not support such a separation of skills.

Cited in Don and Osman (1987) is the clear-cut Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension suggested by Barrett, who separates reading skills into (1) literal recognition or recall, (2) inference, (3) evaluation, and (4) appreciation.

1. **Literal recognition or recall**
   - Recognition or recall of details
   - Recognition or recall of main ideas
   - Recognition or recall of sequence
   - Recognition or recall of comparisons
   - Recognition or recall of cause and effect
   - Recognition or recall of relationships
   - Recognition or recall of character traits.

2. **Inference**
   - Inferring supporting details
- Inferring sequence
- Inferring comparisons
- Inferring cause and effect relationships
- Inferring character traits
- Predicting outcomes
- Inferring figurative language

3. Evaluation
- Judgments of reality or fantasy
- Judgments of fact or opinion
- Judgments of adequacy or validity
- Judgments of appropriateness
- Judgments of worth, desirability and acceptability

4. Appreciation
- Emotional response to the content
- Identification with characters or incidents
- Reaction to the author's use of language Imagery

This taxonomy could serve as a useful guide for students to identify the purposes of their reading a given text. In addition to the skills presented in this list, there are also the skills associated with speed reading - scanning, selection, eye-movements, highlighting, text-breaking and so forth - which are necessary for students to acquire.

Research on reading has shown that there is a considerable degree of controversy in the theory of reading over whether it is possible to identify and label separate skills of reading. Thus, it is unclear (a) whether separable skills exist, and (b) what such skills might consist of and how they might be classified (as well as acquired, taught and tested) Alderson (2000: 10). Nevertheless, the notion of skills and sub-skills in reading is greatly prevalent and influential,
despite the lack of clear empirical justification. In reality, they are important because they offer an apparent means of devising test tasks or items, and of separating reading skills to be tested. They also suggest the possibility of diagnosing a reader's problems to identify remediation.

In short, a skills approach to reading remains popular and influential and cannot be ignored in a treatment of the nature of reading and its assessment. Deciding which reading skills to be targeted at and assessed in the curriculum depends on educational objectives, teaching situations, and student levels.

1.4. Understanding Reading Assessment

1.4.1. What is learner assessment?

The teacher’s role in the reading classroom as a facilitator of learning is inextricably mixed with the role of an assessor. Teachers observe and encourage the process of students’ learning as it occurs during class time, and teachers simultaneously evaluate the products of students’ learning when students speak and respond.

According to McShane (2005: 23), “learner assessment is an ongoing process in which teachers and learners gather and analyze data and use it to make educational decisions.” Angelo (1995: 7) suggests "Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning.” What is noteworthy from these definitions is the repetition of the word ‘ongoing’, which emphasizes continuity as the typical feature of assessment.

Aebersold and Field (1997) help us understand more about assessment by distinguishing the two easily confused terms: test and assessment. According to them, many people tend to equate test with assessment, but assessments are not always tests. To assess is to “engage in an ongoing process that may include exams (periodic exams, midterms, finals), progress tests, quizzes, exercises worked in class or at home, or any other kind of testing or learning.
instrument”. To test, in contrast, is to “administer a single instrument that tests one or more aspects of a student’s learning”. Testing is a part of many assessment programs; assessment programs incorporate but do not depend totally upon individual test instruments. However, both tests and other kinds of assessment need to be as accurate, reliable, consistent, and valid as possible (page 167).

1.4.2. Why do we assess students’ reading skills?

It is evident from the two definitions of assessment mentioned above that the ultimate purposes of assessment are to “make educational decisions” and “to understand and improve student learning”.

More specifically, assessment is carried out to:

- To identify individual goals, strengths, and needs - for initial planning
- To check on learning and spot problems - for ongoing progress monitoring
- To assess learning over time - for outcomes measurement

(McShane, 2005: 23)


- We live in a society where people are appointed and employed on the basis of their qualifications.
- Students themselves need feedback to help them to find out how their learning is going.
- We need feedback on how well students' learning is going, so that we can adjust and develop our teaching.
- Assessment is often the major driving force which gets students down to serious studying.
Assessment is especially important in working with adult readers because the learners in any classroom vary greatly in their reading skills. But the question of ‘how’ is more important. We will now look at some methods for assessing the reading skill.

1.4.3. How can we assess student reading skills?

Aebersold and Field (1997) offer a clear identification of two types of assessing reading: alternative methods and traditional methods. The six types of alternative assessment are journals, portfolios, homework, observation, self-assessment, and peer-assessment. Traditional methods of testing reading include multiple choice questions, vocabulary tests, cloze tests, completion tasks, short answer and open-ended questions, and contextualized or authentic tasks. According to these two researchers, these types of assessments are the most typical and familiar to all of us.

McShane (2005) suggests three general categories of reading assessment, including standardized tests, classroom or curriculum-based tests, and supplemental/alternative assessments. Standardized tests are created with test items selected for difficulty and discrimination. They are administered and scored following standard procedures, so that variations in scores may be assumed to represent real differences in learners’ abilities, not different administrators or testing conditions. Classroom- or curriculum-based tests are closely related to instruction. Teacher-made tests and tests in workbooks and computer-assisted instructional programs fall into this category. Supplemental/alternative measures include any methods used to find out what a learner knows or can do, that are intended to show growth and inform instruction, and are not standardized or traditional tests. Following are examples of tools for and documentation of supplemental or alternative assessment:

- products of group or individual study, like stories, class newsletters or project reports
- records of growth in reading rate
- portfolios and other collections of work samples
1.5. Portfolio Assessment

1.5.1. What is portfolio?

Understanding portfolio assessment is impossible without the understanding of portfolios. However, there is no "right" way to define portfolios (Pierce and O’Malley, 1992). Different researchers define portfolio in different ways, depending on the purpose of the assessment.

Barton & Collins (1993) and Bird (1990) share a common definition, saying that “A portfolio is a container of documents that provide evidence of someone’s knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions.” More specifically, a language portfolio is “a selection of examples of work that provides concrete evidence of a learner’s progress in learning English” (Pettis, 2005).

According to (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer 1991:60)

“Portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit and evidence of student self-reflection.”

In all the definitions of portfolio, it is strongly evident there are two factors that make a portfolio. Firstly, a portfolio is a collection or selection of samples of student work. Secondly, these samples are selected purposely in a way that they can reveal students’ learning progress over a period of time.

1.5.2. What is Portfolio Assessment?
A portfolio used for educational assessment must offer more than a showcase for student products; it must be the product of a complete assessment procedure that has been systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated. According to Pierce and O’Malley (1992), portfolio assessment:

- is the use of records of a student's work over time and in a variety of modes to show the depth, breadth, and development of the student's abilities
- is the purposeful and systematic collection of student work that reflects accomplishment relative to specific instructional goals or objectives
- can be used as an approach for combining the information from both alternative and standardized assessments
- has as key elements student reflection and self-monitoring.

This definition emphasizes on some indispensable elements in portfolio assessment, which are portfolio objectives, evidence of student work, alternative as well as standardized assessment. Student reflection and self-monitoring are also important elements that any portfolio developer should bear in mind.

Also focusing on the issue of defining portfolio assessment, in their further research, Moya and O'Malley (1994) completed their definition by making it more comprehensive and process-oriented. It is “the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio.” While the first definition focuses on the important elements of portfolio assessment, the second one emphasizes the steps one can use in developing portfolio assessment. They are planning, collecting, and analyzing the information in the portfolio.

In a material published by The National Capital Language Resource Center, portfolio assessment is defined as “the systematic, longitudinal collection of student work created in
response to specific, known instructional objectives and evaluated in relation to the same criteria”.

At this point, the difference between a portfolio and portfolio assessment has been made. A portfolio is simply a collection of a student's work whereas portfolio assessment is the whole procedures which involve a lot of teachers’ work such as defining the objectives, collecting the data, and setting assessment criteria. Portfolio is a product of student work, whereas portfolio assessment is what teachers should do to the portfolio.

1.5.3. Why do we use portfolio assessment?

Barton and Collins (1997: 9) believe that adopting a portfolio approach offers significant advantages over other methods of assessment.

- Portfolios will give teachers and students an ongoing opportunity to communicate about the learning that takes place over time in classroom.
- Portfolios will enable teachers to view student work in context.
- Portfolios will encourage a shift in ownership of learning onto students. Students will learn how to make decisions about the quality and usefulness of their own work, and these decisions can lead to a strong sense of personal accomplishment.
- Portfolios will help create a forum for students to communicate their ideas in a supportive environment. These interactions will help your students become more articulate.

Continuing this issue is a summary of the strengths of portfolio assessment, seen in contrast to traditional forms of assessment, which is provided by The National Capital Language Resource Center (1999).
Table 1: Advantages of Portfolio Assessment over Traditional Assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measures student's ability at one time</td>
<td>Measures student's ability over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Done by teacher alone; student often unaware of criteria</td>
<td>Done by teacher and student; student aware of criteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducted outside instruction</td>
<td>Embedded in instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigns student a grade</td>
<td>Involves student in own assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not capture the range of student's language ability</td>
<td>Captures many facets of language learning performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not include the teacher's knowledge of student as a learner</td>
<td>Allows for expression of teacher's knowledge of student as learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not give student responsibility</td>
<td>Student learns how to take responsibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gottlieb (2000) makes clear the benefits that portfolios bring to both students and teachers. For students, the portfolio can provide accumulated evidence of their cognitive, metacognitive, and social development. For teachers, such portfolios help them become better instructors since the portfolio process will encourage teachers to constantly consider what they really want their students to accomplish. It will challenge them to attempt new ways of achieving these accomplishments.

Kemp and Toperoff (1998) provide us with very convincing reasons for using portfolio assessment in the classroom. According to them, portfolio assessment:
- *matches assessment to teaching.* The products that are assessed are mainly products of class work, and are not separated from class activities like test items.
- *has clear goals.* They are decided on at the beginning of instruction and are clear to teachers and students alike.
- *gives a profile of learner abilities* in terms of:
  - *depth:* It enables students to really show the quality of their work, which is done without pressure and time constraints, and with the help of resources, reference materials and collaboration with others.
  - *breadth:* Students can demonstrate a wide range of skills.
  - *growth:* It shows students’ efforts to improve and develop, and demonstrates progress over time.
- *caters to individuals in the heterogeneous class.* Since it is open-ended, students can show work on their own level. Since there is choice, it is flexibly suitable to different learning styles and allows expression of different strengths.
- *develops social skills.* Students are also assessed on work done together, in pairs or groups, on projects and assignments. Therefore their social skills will be developed accordingly.
- *develops independent and active learners.* Students must select and justify portfolio choices; monitor progress and set learning goals.
- *can improve motivation for learning and thus achievement.* Empowerment of students to prove achievement has been found to be motivating.
- *is an efficient tool for demonstrating learning.* Different kinds of products and records of progress are all reflected in this powerful tool – the portfolios. Changes over time are also clearly shown.
- *provides opportunity for student-teacher dialogue.* Enables the teacher to get to know each and every student. Promotes joint goal-setting and negotiation of grades.

Apart from these benefits of using portfolio assessment, there are plenty of other advantages. Many teachers who have worked with portfolios consider reflection the single most important
learning opportunity that portfolios provide to students. Just as importantly, teachers gain invaluable insight into student learning and performance while reading the reflections of their students (Hirvela and Pierson, 2000 p.112). Last but not least, portfolios help us avoid pointless blaming (Santos, 1997). For such appealing reasons discussed above, applying portfolio assessment in the classroom is definitely rewarding and worth every effort.

Although portfolio assessment brings obvious advantages to ESL classrooms, it certainly has some disadvantages. A major area of concern is the complexity involved in grading such collections, such as ‘developing appropriate grading guidelines’, ‘maintaining consistency in portfolio grading’ and ‘avoiding subjectivity in grading’ (Hirvela and Pierson, 2000: 110). This idea is also further agreed upon by Race (1995), saying that because of the individual nature of portfolios, it is harder to decide on a set of assessment criteria which will be equally valid across a diverse set of portfolios. He also adds one more challenge that portfolio assessment causes to teachers; that is the amount of time and effort to be spent on this work. Epstein (2006) raises a concern that is really worth taking into account in the process of evaluating portfolios: Data from portfolio assessments can be difficult to analyze or aggregate, particularly over long periods of time.

A discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of using portfolio assessment in ESL classrooms helps us have an insight into the proper use of this type of continuous assessment. All things considered, the pros outweigh the cons, and we can conclude that if planned, managed, and conducted in the appropriate way, portfolio assessment can bring the best outcomes to both teachers and students.

1.5.4. Characteristics of a Model Portfolio Assessment

Moya and O’Malley (1994) identify five distinguishing features of portfolio assessment. These features typify model portfolios that can be used as a systematic assessment tool in instructional planning and student evaluation.
Comprehensiveness. Comprehensive data collection and analysis are necessary for the determination of the depth and breadth of a student's capabilities. Although comprehensiveness is a critical component of a good portfolio procedure, a portfolio can easily become an aggregation of everything a student produces. Therefore, a screening procedure needs to be established that will include only selected, high-priority information in the portfolio.

Predetermined and Systematic. A sound portfolio procedure should be planned prior to implementation. The purpose of using a portfolio, the contents of the portfolio, data collection schedule, and student performance criteria are described as part of portfolio planning. Each entry in the portfolio has a purpose, and the purpose is clearly understood by all portfolio stakeholders. Besides, criteria for assessment must be consistent throughout the process of portfolio assessment.

Informative. This means that the information in the portfolio must be meaningful to teachers and students. It also must be usable for instruction and curriculum adaptation to student needs. In ESL settings, a portfolio can be particularly useful to communicate specific examples of students’ work to students, and to other teachers.

Tailored. A good portfolio procedure is tailored to the purpose for which it will be used, to classroom goals and objectives and to individual student assessment needs. Assessment instruments and procedures are adapted to match information needs, and to be compatible with students’ level. With ESL students, assessment procedures are designed to reveal information about student performance in all curriculum areas relevant to the students.

Authentic. A model portfolio procedure facilitates the demonstration of authentic activities used during classroom instruction. In ESL, authentic language may be assessed across several contexts: formal classroom activities and informal classroom settings (e.g., cooperative
learning groups). An effective portfolio procedure will include assessment of authentic classroom-based language tasks, i.e., tasks that the student encounters naturally as part of instruction.

Added to the list of characteristics of a model portfolio assessment are seven attributes provided by Barton and Collins (1997). First, portfolios are *multi-sourced*. They offer an opportunity to evaluate a variety of specific evidence when making determinations about learner competency. Second, they are *authentic*. Classroom instruction and the multiple pieces of evidence in the portfolios are directly linked. Third, portfolios are a form of *dynamic assessment*. They reflect growth and change in students over time. Often, the educational portfolio contains self-selected student work at various points in the student’s learning rather than a sampling of only the best work.

The fourth characteristic of portfolio assessment is *explicitness of purpose*. Teachers must explicitly define and share the purpose of their instruction so students know what is expected of them before they begin developing their portfolio evidence. This emphasis on clear purpose leads to a fifth characteristic – *integration*. This means the evidence students compile must combine their academic work and their life experiences. *Student ownership* is the sixth characteristic. Each portfolio is unique because the student determines what evidence to include and completes a self-evaluative reflection as part of the development process. The last attribute of portfolio assessment is its *multipurposed* nature. It may be used as an assessment tool for not only students but for teachers as well. For students, it basically helps them be aware of their own learning. For teachers, assessing students’ portfolios is an indicator of their performance and hence any adaptation on further lessons. Besides, portfolio assessment entails with it many other purposes such as helping develop students’ activeness and autonomy in study, to name just a few.

Although the characteristics of a model portfolio assessment provided by Moya & O’Malley and Barton & Collin are many, we can figure out some important attributes without which
portfolio assessment will not be a success. They are the explicitness of purposes, the usefulness of information (to teachers and students) and the consistency of assessment criteria.

1.5.5. Portfolio Design and Development

Barton and Collins (1997) offer the following model of portfolio development which has been greatly influenced by Elbow (1991), Winograd et al. (1991), Bird (1990), and Wiggins (1989). This portfolio design has three closely related but distinct aspects: purposes, evidence and assessment criteria.

Purposes

Purposes are established to determine what the portfolios will be used to describe or measure. Determining the purpose provides focus and direction. The more explicit portfolio purposes are, the less busy teachers will be.

Barton and Collins then offer three steps to developing purposes for portfolios. First, brainstorm one to five responses to the question: “What is it I really want my students to learn in this course/time period?” The responses are limited to five so that only essential goals are focused on. Next, prioritize the lists. Set some purposes as primary and some others secondary. Finally, think about ways students can demonstrate how they have accomplished these purposes.

Evidence

According to Collins (1991), there are four classes of evidence: artifacts, reproductions, attestations, and productions. Artifacts are documents, such as homework and student papers, that are produced during normal and academic work in classroom. Reproductions are documentation of student work outside the classroom, such as special projects or interviews. Attestations are the documentation you and other teachers generate about the student’s academic progress. Productions are documents students prepare just for the portfolios.
Productions include several kinds of materials, but the most important one is reflection. Reflective statements allow students to summarize the documents in the portfolio and to describe how they have grown as learners.

Who actually decides what to include in the portfolio?
Normally rich portfolios often result from negotiation and include a combination of teacher-prescribed evidence and evidence students elected to submit.

How much evidence should be included in a portfolio?
Portfolio developers can decide this by asking “What will be added to the portfolio if this piece of evidence is included?” whenever they wants to add one more piece of evidence.

How should the evidence be presented?
This is not just a question of display. Instead, it is a question of guided organization. Normally, students can organize their portfolios chronologically or thematically. The efforts students put in organizing their evidence provide yet another learning opportunity as they review and evaluate the quality of their evidence.

Assessment criteria
Portfolios are a relatively new concept, so universally applicable assessment criteria have not been established. Different assessors may have different criteria for assessing student portfolios; therefore, the standards are relative.

Teachers’ approach to grading students’ portfolios is directly linked to the purposes they establish for them. As Paulson and Paulson (1990) state, “What we see when we evaluate a portfolio is the product of the glasses we wear when we evaluate portfolios.” As teachers look at each piece of evidence, they should ask. “Does this evidence meet its intended purpose in a compelling way?” If the answer is yes, the evidence can be accepted. If a piece of evidence is
found to be less than compelling, it should be returned to the student along with feedback for its revision.

From Barton and Collins’ model for portfolio assessment, we can generalize that the quality of students’ efforts and the accuracy of teachers’ assessments about their work depend heavily on how clearly portfolio purposes are stated. The more explicit these purposes are, the more adequate teachers’ judgments on the quality of students’ portfolios will be.

Understanding the essential characteristics of a model portfolio assessment plays an important part in creating procedures for portfolio assessment to work. Moya and O'Malley (1994) offer a comprehensive and step by step Portfolio Assessment Model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1: Identify purpose and focus of portfolio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Establish a portfolio committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Focus the portfolio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2: Plan portfolio contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Specify portfolio contents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Determine frequency of assessment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 3: Design portfolio analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Set standards and criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Determine procedure to integrate information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Schedule staff responsibilities for analysis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4: Prepare for instruction
10. Plan feedback to students and parents.

Step 5: Plan verification of procedures
11. Establish a system to check reliability.
12. Establish a system to validate decisions.

Step 6: Implement the model

Table 2: Portfolio Assessment Model

These basic six steps in the procedures of a model portfolio assessment are further described as follow.

Step 1: Identify purpose and focus of portfolio
1. Establish a Portfolio Development Committee. A committee can be made up of classroom teachers, the head of the subject say, reading, that students are studying, and the head of the division or department in charge.

2. Focus the Portfolio. Once the portfolio committee has been established, its first task is to determine the purpose for which information in the portfolio will be used. The next step is to identify the instructional goals that are relevant to the purposes. The goals selected will guide the contents of the portfolio and the criteria used to assess student language development, so these goals should be carefully selected.

Step 2: Plan Portfolio Contents
3. Select Assessment Procedures. The purpose of this stage of portfolio planning is to determine how information about students’ progress related to each goal will be gathered.
Both formal (test) and informal (non-test) techniques should be considered for their potential in eliciting specific kinds of information about students’ progress.

4. Specify Portfolio Contents. This step means planning the presentation of student assessment information in the portfolio. Some types of information, such as student work samples, can be collected directly from students and placed in the portfolio; other forms of information, such as planned observations, ratings, or standardized tests, will necessitate the development or selection of instruments that will be used both for gathering information about students’ progress and documenting the information in the portfolio.

5. Determine the Frequency of Assessment. This step involves determining how often each type of assessment technique will be used.

**Step 3: Design Portfolio Analysis**

6. Set Standards and Criteria for Interpretation of Portfolio Contents. Standards and criteria for students’ performance are necessary for reaching final decisions such as entry/exit or pass/fail. The standards and criteria established by the portfolio committee will be used to assist in interpreting each student's portfolio and will, therefore, play a critical role in portfolio planning.

7. Determine the Procedure for Integrating Portfolio Information. Students’ portfolios will contain a mixture of information that, at first glance, will seem impossible to analyze; there might be test scores, un-graded work samples, observations, teacher checklists, and cloze passages. In order to evaluate student language development holistically, a system for integrating and interpreting these diverse sources of information must be devised.

8. Schedule Staff Responsibilities for Portfolio Analysis. Portfolio analysis activities should be allocated among portfolio committee members and should be scheduled at predetermined points.
Step 4: Prepare for Instructional Use

9. Plan Instructional Use. To avoid excessive accumulation of papers, the portfolio could be divided into two sections: required portfolio contents, which are needed to maintain basic information that is related to instructional goals or needed for educational decisions and supplementary portfolio contents, which broaden the range of information to provide a comprehensive picture of students’ competency.

10. Plan Feedback to Students. Portfolios can be used to convey information to students concerning their progress. Again, this step can be carried out in different ways such as teacher-student conference or oral and/or written feedback.

Step 5: Identify Procedures to Verify Accuracy of Information

11. Establish a System to Check Reliability of Portfolio Information. Reliability of informal or alternative assessment information needs to be addressed to ensure that judgments about student performance are based on accurate information. This can be done by carrying some standardize tests.

12. Establish a System to Validate Decisions. One of the strengths of the portfolio approach is that varied forms of evidence can be collected and evaluated. One type of evidence can be analyzed to determine if it is in agreement with other types of evidence and if essentially the same instructional decision would be made from both.

Also according to Moya and O'Malley, there is no precedent for validating a portfolio procedure, but three methods are suggested: (a) a study of the relationship between conclusions derived using portfolio information and conclusions derived using objective data, e.g., standardized test scores (a concurrent validity study); (b) a study of the relationship between conclusions derived using portfolio information and teacher judgment (a concurrent
validity study); and (c) a longitudinal study of the relationship of decisions made using the portfolio information with subsequent student performance (a predictive validity study).

**Step 6: Implement the Model**

It is now the right time to implement the model. In the course of conducting portfolio assessment, teachers collect information from students, and analyze and verify the data used for instructional design. Monitoring progress is an important job at this stage.

Since the original application of the portfolio assessment model suggested by Moya and O'Malley was in a very broad context (elementary and secondary ESL educators concerned with monitoring the language development of limited English proficient (LEP) students), this model is somewhat cumbersome and involves a great amount of cooperation from other partners in an educational community. However, it can be adapted for use in other educational settings. Within the context of a classroom, some steps may preferably be omitted, depending on the teaching situations and purposes of the program.

In conclusion, the researcher has reviewed a considerable amount of literature relevant to the main issues of this paper. Particularly in this chapter, discussions on the definition of reading, reading assessment, and portfolio assessment have been elaborated. The researcher also distinguishes different types of reading skills which can be assessed by two major types of assessment: traditional and alternative. Portfolio assessment is a form of alternative assessment in which a student's progress is measured over a period of time in various language learning contexts. Understanding the benefits of using portfolio assessment will encourage the use of this evaluation method in teaching and learning. Just as important is the question of designing and developing a portfolio assessment program so that it can bring about desirable outcomes to both teachers and students. Procedures for this program should be planned ahead carefully with clear objectives, evidence of student work and growth, and assessment criteria. Only by doing so can teachers assure the success of portfolio assessment in their work.
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Background to the Study

2.1.1. Students

The second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU were normally aged between 20 to 22 and came from different family backgrounds with the majority coming from the countryside of Hanoi. This entailed a number of difficulties encountered by those students when entering a vibrant living and studying environment in their new place. In terms of educational backgrounds, the students have learnt English for at least five years, three years at secondary schools and two years in the department. During the three years at secondary schools, most of the students did not receive adequate English learning conditions. Therefore, besides some knowledge of English grammar, they hardly acquired any effective skills in reading, especially with long and slightly complicated texts. Consequently, they were almost beginners in reading comprehension when entering the college.

After nearly two years studying at this college, the students had had a lot of chances to improve their language skills regarding listening, reading, writing and speaking. At this stage of the four academic year training program, their English was at intermediate level. With regard to reading skills, the students, after semester 3, had been given a considerable amount of practice in developing basic skills like skimming for main ideas, scanning for specific information, surveying, understanding vocabulary from context, making inferences and drawing conclusions. In terms of text types, the students were also able to read semi-authentic texts of different genres including advertisements, novel extracts, articles, reports, manuals etc. The topics for reading were familiar with every day life ranging from education, health, sports to holiday and entertainment.

2.2.2. Teachers
The second year English teaching group consisted of 20 teachers of different ages. Only two of them were young distinguished graduates from the college at the time of the research. The rest were well-trained and professionally experienced with at least two years’ teaching. It should be noted that all these teachers, both experienced and novice earned their B.A. degree from the college and therefore, it can be inferred that they all had similar studying and teaching approach. The majority of these teachers were master degree holders. Some were going to have the degree in the near future. Besides a strong sense of responsibilities, they were very enthusiastic and helpful not only to students but also to each other, both at work and in daily life.

2.2.3. Teaching reading to second year students

At the time of the research, the students had just completed semester three and were entering semester four (they had two semesters for each school year). The teaching of reading to the second year students at semester four had to meet basic requirements defined in the syllabus. One major objective of the reading program for the students was that after the 15-week semester, their level of proficiency had to be at FCE (First Certificate English). FCE is an intermediate level Cambridge ESOL exam, at level B2 of the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

In the reading syllabus for second year students, it was learnt that they had 15 lessons of 90 minutes every week. In total, after a 15-week semester they would have 22.5 hours of reading, which is not yet sufficient to make a competent reader at the targeted level of FCE. Normally students need to do a lot of extensive reading to enhance their reading proficiency, hence the urge for a program to facilitate and motivate students’ reading.

The main course book for second year students at CFL is Reading 2. Its objective is to build and develop reading skills for learners at intermediate level. The course book is divided into two sections; the first half is for semester three and the second for semester four.
Section one consists of two parts. Part one is made up of the first six units which introduce basic reading skills. They are:

- identifying the topic sentence
- finding main ideas
- word-study / sentence study
- paragraph reading
- making inferences
- understanding complex structures of English sentences
- understanding vocabulary from context
- surveying
- word formation

At the end of each unit are short reading selections which give students intensive practice in developing the reading skills that have been presented. The second part of the book, from unit 7 to unit 15, are reading texts arranged into familiar topics such as family, traveling, sports, entertainment, holidays and transport. Its objective is to help students practice the reading skills they have learned in the previous part. The selections provide students with plenty of useful information which aims to enhance students’ linguistic competence and background knowledge including lexical, semantic, syntactic, discourse knowledge and that of the surrounding world.

Section two includes 15 units of long reading texts the topics of which are daily life ranging from cooking, sports, and jobs to environment, insurance and education. The objective of this section is to deepen students’ reading skills already acquired in semester three. In addition, some more advanced reading skills are introduced and practiced. They are summarizing and making inferences.
The language for these reading texts is more complicated. The comprehension questions after each text aim to check students’ understanding of the texts and to provide them with not only background information about the world but also complex language structures and vocabulary.

It should be noted that from the list of reading skills which are targeted at in the two sections of the Reading 2 Coursebook, five skills were sorted out as targeted skills in the experimental program described in this paper. The five skills are as follows.

- finding main ideas
- reading for specific information
- understanding vocabulary from context
- summarizing
- making inferences

The reason for this choice is that first, these skills are among the most common ones. Second, from the researcher’s experience, these skills, especially making inferences and summarizing, have been cited as difficult to students. Last but not least, they are the skills that readers “typically need to develop” Alderson (2000: 1).

2.2. The experimental research

This section begins with a repetition of the research questions followed by a brief description of the essential factors involved in the experimental research such as variables, participants, and experimental treatment. An elaboration on the steps that the researcher took to carry out this study is also provided at the end of this section.

2.2.1. Research questions
This research is an experiment into the effects of a 15 week portfolio assessment program on the reading skills of a group of English major students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. In this light, the researcher would like to find answers to the following questions.

1. *What is the relation between the portfolio assessment experimental project and students’ reading skills?*
2. *What is the progress, if any, as perceived by the students, in developing their reading skills?*

### 2.2.2. Variables

Generally speaking, experimental research is carried out in order to explore the strength of relationships between variables. In this study the independent variable (also known as the experimental treatment, which would be dealt with in more details right after) was the portfolio assessment reading program and the dependent variable was the reading proficiency of second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. The researcher wanted to look at the causal relationship between these two variables to find out the extent to which this assessment method would work for these target subjects.

### 2.2.3. Participants

As described earlier, the population for this experiment was the second year students from 20 classes at DEALC, CFL, VNU. From this population, a sample of 25 students was selected. They were all students of the class where the researcher was in charge of her reading lessons in the semester four. (From now on this class will be referred to as Group A). As directly chosen from the population, this sample can be perceived as representative of the population with all the characteristics regarding backgrounds and teaching and learning conditions mentioned above.
2.2.4. Experimental Treatment

The teaching method or the treatment employed in this experiment was a portfolio assessment project conducted over a 15 week semester. It was incorporated into Reading 2, the main coursebook for the second year students of this study, constituting a new reading program for the participants. Its primary purpose was to help students develop the targeted reading skills covered in Reading 2 by providing them with more chances to practice doing collected reading exercises in the portfolios.

The experimental treatment was designed under the following portfolio assessment procedures which were developed and used in this study by the researcher basing on a review of studies by Moya and O’Malley (1994), Barton and Collins (1997), Honsa (2002), and Kemp and Toperoff (1998). These procedures are presented step by step below.

**Step 1: Planning portfolio assessment**

This step is the most important since it affects the success of portfolio assessment. The planning of this portfolio assessment project was divided into four sub-steps: planning portfolio purposes, planning portfolio contents, planning portfolio assessment criteria, and planning classroom procedures. The first one was planning portfolio purposes which were given priorities depending on what types of improvement they might bring to the students (directly or indirectly). In this framework, the program was designed with a view to helping students improve their reading skills, reflect on their learning progress and encourage self-study as well as self-assessment.

The second step was planning portfolio contents, deciding on what, how much to put in the portfolios and how to organize the information students brought to their portfolios. Normally, each portfolio entry had to contain the following core items (1) one sample of student work, (2) two samples of their friends’ work (reading exercise), and (3) assessment with three types:
self-assessment (reflections), peer assessment, and teacher’s assessment. Students may also add extra materials if they think these evidences help to showcase their work.

The next part was a very important step in which the researcher set criteria by which students’ portfolios would be assessed. In this experiment, three types of assessments were established for the evaluation of one portfolio entry; they were (1) self-assessment, i.e. students’ weekly log; (2) peer-assessment, carried out in group discussion, and (3) teacher’s assessment with the help of a rating scale.

The last step was planning classroom procedures that occur in a 90 minute reading lesson. As planned, each lesson was divided into two sections. The first one was the presentation of all the targeted reading skills stated in Reading 2, the coursebook for the second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. The next section of the reading lesson was for portfolios. First, students were required to collect one reading exercise according to the targeted reading skill of the week. There were five skills including finding main ideas, reading for details, understanding vocabulary in context, making inferences and drawing conclusions, and summarizing. After having collected the right type of exercise, students had to do them at home and find out the right answers. Next, they brought their exercise to class for their friends to do and to assess (peer-assessment). The assessment would serve as input information for their reflections at home. In the following week, they handed in all the materials in one entry to the teacher for assessment. All of the components of portfolio assessment design that have just been described so far can be found on table 3, 4, and 5 on the next page.
DESIGN OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

I. Portfolio purposes
   - To equip students with background knowledge on the following reading skills
     - Reading for main ideas
     - Reading for specific information
     - Understanding vocabulary from context
     - Making inferences and drawing conclusions
     - Summarizing
   - To develop those reading skills
   - To encourage self-assessment
   - To encourage self-study and independent learning
   - To encourage material searching skills

II. Portfolio contents
   Each portfolio entry should include the following items:
   - A reading exercise collected by the portfolio owner
   - Two reading exercises from two friends in group
   - A log written bi-weekly
   - Teacher assessment

III. Portfolio procedures
   1. collect reading materials
   2. bring to class for sharing with friends
   3. write logs at home
   4. meet and discuss with teacher biweekly

IV. Portfolio assessment
   1. Self-assessment
   2. Teacher assessment

(Table 3: Planning portfolio assessment)
### PORTFOLIO RATING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FAIL</th>
<th>PASS</th>
<th>GOOD</th>
<th>EXCELLENT</th>
<th>Your grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT</td>
<td>Portfolio collection includes less than 50% of:</td>
<td>Portfolio collection includes more than 70% of:</td>
<td>Portfolio collection includes more than 80% of:</td>
<td>Portfolio collection includes more than 90% of:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Student’s reading exercises</td>
<td>- Student’s reading exercises</td>
<td>- Student’s reading exercises</td>
<td>- Student’s reading exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Peers’ reading exercises</td>
<td>- Peers’ reading exercises</td>
<td>- Peers’ reading exercises</td>
<td>- Peers’ reading exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Personal reflections</td>
<td>- Personal reflections</td>
<td>- Personal reflections</td>
<td>- Personal reflections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Teacher assessments</td>
<td>- Teacher assessments</td>
<td>- Teacher assessments</td>
<td>- Teacher assessments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUALITY</td>
<td>- Students can't do peers’ reading exercises</td>
<td>- Students can do peers’ reading exercises with some difficulty</td>
<td>- Students can do peers’ reading exercises rather well</td>
<td>- Students can do peers’ reading exercises very easily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reflections show little evidence of learning</td>
<td>- Reflections show some evidence of learning</td>
<td>- Reflections show adequate evidence of learning</td>
<td>- Reflections show a lot of evidence of learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reflections do not show an awareness of student strengths and</td>
<td>- Reflections do not show an awareness of student strengths and</td>
<td>- Reflections show full awareness of student strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td>- Reflections show full awareness of student strengths and weaknesses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weaknesses</td>
<td>weaknesses</td>
<td>- Portfolios show good improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td>- Portfolios show remarkable improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Portfolios do not show improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td>- Portfolios do not show improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td>- Portfolios show good improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td>- Portfolios show remarkable improvements in targeted reading skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORMAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entries are not arranged in any order</td>
<td>Entries are arranged in order</td>
<td>Entries are arranged in order with explanation for such organization</td>
<td>Entries are arranged in order with good explanation for such organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entries are badly presented</td>
<td>Entries are clearly presented</td>
<td>Entries are clearly and well presented</td>
<td>Entries are clearly and attractively presented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials (reading exercises and reflections) are hand-written and not clear to see</td>
<td>Materials (reading exercises and reflections) are hand-written</td>
<td>Materials (reading exercises and reflections) are typed</td>
<td>Materials (reading exercises and reflections) are typed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONCLUSION | Portfolios do not meet objectives | Portfolios need improvement | Portfolios meet objectives | Portfolios exceed objectives |

**YOUR FINAL GRADE**

*(Adapted from Kemp & Toperoff, 1998)*

*Table 4: Portfolio rating scale*
### Table 5: Week plan for portfolio assessment classroom procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>ACTIVITIES TO DO</th>
<th>EXERCISE TYPES SUGGESTED</th>
<th>TEXT TYPES SUGGESTED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>week 2 &amp; week 3</td>
<td>finding main ideas</td>
<td>- study ‘finding main ideas’ skill</td>
<td>- matching a heading with a paragraph</td>
<td>- book chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- collect materials</td>
<td>- true, false, not given</td>
<td>- articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- skim for main ideas</td>
<td>- multiple choice</td>
<td>- journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- do friends’ exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td>- novel extracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- write reflection at home</td>
<td></td>
<td>- short stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 4</td>
<td>DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 5 &amp; week 6</td>
<td>understanding vocabulary from context</td>
<td>- study ‘understand. vocab in context’ skill</td>
<td>- matching (new words with meanings)</td>
<td>- any</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- collect materials</td>
<td>- multiple choice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- guess the meaning of important new words using context clues and word study skills</td>
<td>- short answer questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- do friends’ exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- write reflection at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 7</td>
<td>DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 8 &amp; week 9</td>
<td>summarizing</td>
<td>- study ‘summarizing’ skill</td>
<td>- close exercise with answer choices given</td>
<td>- short stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- collect materials</td>
<td>- cloze exercise without any answer choices</td>
<td>- book chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- complete a summary</td>
<td></td>
<td>- articles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- do friends’ exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td>- reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- write reflection at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 10</td>
<td>DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 11 &amp; week 12</td>
<td>making inferences</td>
<td>- study ‘making inferences’ skill</td>
<td>- multiple choice</td>
<td>- stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- collect materials</td>
<td>- open answer</td>
<td>(detectives, jokes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- read for full understanding to arrive at the right implications or conclusions</td>
<td>- true, false, not given</td>
<td>- news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- do friends’ exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td>- articles &amp; journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- write reflection at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 13</td>
<td>DISCUSSION WITH TEACHER</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 14</td>
<td>reading for specific information</td>
<td>- study ‘reading for specific information’ skill</td>
<td>- complete a chart, diagram, table</td>
<td>- reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- collect materials</td>
<td>- complete sentences</td>
<td>- statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- scan for specific information</td>
<td>- true, false, not given</td>
<td>- biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- do friends’ exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td>- travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- write reflection at home</td>
<td></td>
<td>- brochures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- travel guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- timetables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>week 15</td>
<td>- review of whole process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- portfolio exhibition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Somchoen, 2002)
Step 2: Introducing portfolio assessment to the students

The next decisive step was getting students familiar with the idea of doing portfolios in class. Introducing the idea of portfolio to students was not an easy task since the second year students of this study had never done like this before. Two weeks before the semester four, the researcher had a meeting with the participants to discuss about the portfolio assessment reading program. Quite a number of samples and handouts were provided including portfolio design stating clearly about purposes, contents, assessments, and classroom procedures. A portfolio sample was also given with all the core items in an entry such as reading exercise, self-assessment (reflections), peer-assessment and teacher’s assessment. To assist students in writing reflections for self-assessment, the following guided questions were provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Where is the material from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Why did you choose the material?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did you encounter any difficulties or conveniences when doing the task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you think of your performance on the exercises collected by group partners?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What were your tips or reading strategies in doing this type of exercise?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What/ how would you change for a better task next time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What are you satisfied and/or unsatisfied with the most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you have any general suggestions or advice for your friends?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Suggested questions for students’ reflections

A checklist on choosing reading materials was also provided to students before hand to ensure the validity of the texts their peers read over the semester.
MATERIAL EVALUATION CHECKLIST

Does the material you chose…

☐ have an interesting topic?
☐ contain fruitful information?
☐ have an appropriate length? (approximately 500 words)
☐ have its exercise type relevant to the targeted reading skill?
☐ contain less than 25% new words and structures?
☐ have its background knowledge understandable to your readers?
☐ have a clear and beautiful layout?

Table 7: Material evaluation checklist

For the first two weeks, students were very confused but these worries gradually faded as they really got on to the task.

Step 3: Implementing portfolio assessment

As everything had been ready, the teacher, the students, and the portfolio assessment, the researcher went on to implementing this project. Activities for the teacher and the students were closely adhered according to the portfolio design. Every week the students submitted their entry with the required items. The task of the researcher in this phase was to monitor progress by keeping track of the entries and progress in portfolio completion, giving oral feedback (by holding a bi-week panel discussion) and written comments on students’ work.

Step 4: Evaluating the portfolio process

This was the final step of the procedures for carrying out this study. After the 15 week portfolio assessment project, students were looking forward to a portfolio exhibition, a showcase of their work. The students were free to organize their portfolio entries in whatever
order they wanted to, but they had to present the reason for such arrangement. This was the right time for the researcher to take a step back and reflect on the entire process and evaluate the success with the portfolio. What worked well that should be included next time? What changes should be made for the next time?

2.2.5. Procedures for carrying out the research

The whole research was carried out over a period of 15 weeks of semester four, from January to April, school year 2005 – 2006. The first step in the research was selecting the participants. At the beginning of the semester, 25 second year students from a class at DEALC, CFL, VNU (referred to as Group A) were selected, constituting the participants in this study.

In the first week, a pre-test was given to the experimental group which was then followed by the researcher’s explanation of the portfolio assessment plan, its objectives, contents, procedures for in-class and home activities, and methods of assessment (designed in the previous part, experimental treatment).

From week 2 to 14, the experimental treatment i.e., the portfolio assessment project, was given to all the subjects. During this process, the researcher collected students’ portfolio entries, read and analyzed their reflections to extract the relevant information about their opinions toward the program and help them overcome difficulties they might encounter in the course of their work.

The program ended in week 15, which consisted of a review of the whole process and a portfolio exhibition section in which the students’ best work was presented. It was also in this week that a post-test was given.
All the above mentioned procedures were an important phase where all the necessary information could be collected. With such input information, the researcher would need some effective instruments to analyze them, which is the focus of the next section.

### 2.2.6. Instruments for Data Analysis

**Pre-test and post-test**

As a measure of the possible effects of the portfolio assessment project on the subjects’ reading ability, two tests were given, one prior to the start of the program (pre-test) and the other after its completion (post-test). The experimenter administered the tests to experimental subjects and assured them that these tests would not be recorded for grading or examination purposes.

The two tests were designed with the purpose of testing the students’ reading skills which were supposed to be mastered after semester four. These skills included identifying main ideas, reading for specific information, understanding vocabulary in context, summarizing, and making inferences and drawing conclusions. Each subject was given 45 minutes to do this test under real test conditions. There were 30 questions in the test, each of which equaled one point. Therefore, in total the maximum score for the test was 30 points. This test was design with the level of difficulty being equal to FCE, the targeted level of proficiency for second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. The questions were taken from books designed for readers at intermediate level, therefore, the validity of the test could be ensured. With these objectives in mind, the experimenter designed a test with the following items of specification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>No. of Questions</th>
<th>Reading skill to be tested</th>
<th>Type of exercise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Identifying main ideas</td>
<td>Heading matching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reading for specific information</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Understanding vocabulary from context</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Summarizing</td>
<td>Cloze text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Making inferences and drawing conclusions</td>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These item specifications were equally applicable to both the pre-test and post-test. However, the order of the test questions and answer choices in the post-test was made different to the pre-test so as to avoid student memorization. (For further details on the two tests, please refer to appendix 1 and 2)

**Students’ reflections**

As part of the portfolio procedures, students’ reflections had to be completed and submitted after every two weeks. These reflections served as valuable source of information for the researcher to judge students’ progress as perceived by themselves, whether they can benefit from this program and if so, how.

The reflections were in the format of a diary and written in free style. Each reflection should reflect what the students think of the following features.

- the reading skill to be acquired in the week
- the exercise they have collected
- their performance on the exercises collected by partners in their groups
- strategies or tips to do a certain type of exercise in the week

The reflections were then submitted to the teacher for comments.

**2.2.7. Procedures for Data Analysis**

The data analysis procedures of this study depend on the research questions stated earlier. To find out the answer to the first research question, after the implementation of the portfolio assessment program, the researcher applied a test of significance to compare the pre-test scores and the post-test scores achieved by the participants. Because the scores were related (the same students took both tests), the t-test for independent means is not appropriate. Instead, the *t-test for dependent means* is the appropriate statistical test.
In order to carry out the t-test, the researcher employed the following steps offered by Salkind (2006).

1. **Statement of null hypothesis**
   
   Ho = there is no difference between the two testings

2. **Establishing level of risk (or the level of significance or type 1 error) associated with the null hypothesis**

3. **Selection of the appropriate test statistic**

4. **Computation of the test statistic value (t)**

5. **Determination of the value needed for rejection of the null hypothesis**

6. **If the obtained value does not exceed the critical value, then the null hypothesis is the most attractive explanation. The observation based on the sample data is not extreme enough to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between the two testings. The null hypothesis that there is no difference between the two means is the most attractive explanation.**

7. **If the obtained value is more extreme than the critical value, the null hypothesis cannot be accepted.**

---

| Table 8: Steps in testing hypothesis |

The results were analyzed to conclude whether the treatment might have been associated with any differences in reading proficiency after the study was completed.

In order to find out the students’ progress after the program, the researcher looked carefully at students’ reflections, read and analyze relevant information to come to any conclusions and make adaptations for further work. This analysis would eventually find out answers to the second research question.
In short, this chapter has just presented some major points in the methodology of this research. It is a pre-test post-test experimental research which measures the relationship between an independent variable – the 15 week portfolio assessment program and a dependent variable – student reading proficiency. Participants were 25 second year students from group A at DEALC, CFL, VNU. Under the experimental treatment, each week the 25 subjects were required to collect a reading exercise that tests a reading skill to be studied in the week. In class they worked in groups of three, and each student had 10 minutes to do their friends’ exercises. At home they wrote reflections and handed in to the teacher for comments. The procedures for this experiment lasted for over 3 months, starting with a pre-test, which was followed by the application of the actual portfolio program and ended with a post-test. A t-test was then conducted to measure differences that might have been caused to the subjects’ reading skills by the experimental treatment. In the next chapter, we will look at results of the analysis of all the data collected from the research.
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Data analysis results
This chapter reports the analysis results of the data collected from the experimental study that used a pre-test, post-test design to measure the relation between portfolio assessment and students’ reading proficiency. The data was collected from two sources: the pre-test, post-test and the student logs. Data collected from pre-test and post-test was analyzed quantitatively by using a t-test to compare their mean scores; data collected from students’ logs was analyzed qualitatively by citing meaningful information from the logs.

3.1.1. Data collected from pre-test and post-test
The students’ scores on the two tests can be found on table 4 on the next page. This data was used as input information for t-test analysis. But before applying the t-test, we will justify its relevance to the context of this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Pre-test score</th>
<th>Post-test score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9: Pre-test and post-test scores

Conditions for a t-test to occur

There are several conditions for a t-test to work, as stated in research theories as follow.

- The researcher is examining causal relationships between variables (Salkind, 2006: 175)
- The distribution of scores for each group must be approximately normal (resembling the shape of a bell), and
- The variances for the scores of the two groups should be about the same (Brown, 1991: 166)
The following analysis would justify whether these assumptions would be applicable to this study. First, it has been clearly stated in the research questions that the main purpose of this study is to measure the relation between two variables: the portfolio assessment reading program and second year students’ reading proficiency.

Second, with the analysis of P-P Plots (a tool of SPSS used for testing distributions), we can easily see that the pre-test scores and the post-test scores are normally distributed. The distributions of these two sets of scores can be illustrated in the two graphs below.

![Figure 1. Distribution of Pre-test Scores](image-url)
Finally, regarding the comparison of the standard deviation of the pre-test (SD1) and that of the post-test (SD2), computation results showed that they are approximately the same with SD1 and SD2 being equal to 2.19 and 2.37 respectively.

From the analysis, we can conclude that with all the necessary conditions, a t-test is appropriate for the analysis of the data collected from the pre-test and post-test. We will now apply the steps in carrying out a t-test which have already been stated in the previous chapter.

**Carrying out the t-test**

1. Statement of null hypothesis
   
   $H_0 =$ there is no difference between the mean score of the pre-test and that of the post-test.
2. Establishing level of risk (or the level of significance or type 1 error) associated with the null hypothesis
The value of .001% was used, which means that we accept only 1 percent out of 1000 percent that the differences can occur by chance.

3. Selection of the appropriate test statistic
The appropriate test statistic for this null hypothesis is the t-test between dependent means. The means are dependent because they are based on the performance of the same group.

4. Computation of the test statistic value (t)
The software SPSS was used to find out the t-value of the test. Results are shown in table 10 as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19.12</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.24</td>
<td>.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 10: Paired Samples Statistics*

The paired sample statistics table shows that the mean score for the pre-test is 19.12 compared with 21.00 for the post-test. We will now compare these two means to see whether there are any significant differences between the scores of these two tests. The t-test for two dependent means will be applied to answer this question. The table below presents the result of the t-test.

| Paired Differences | Mean   | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | |t| |
|--------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------|---|---|
| Pair Pre-test & Post-test | -1.88  | 2.01           | .401            | 4.684 |

*Table 11: T-test result*
5. Determination of the value needed for rejection of the null hypothesis

Based on a table of critical values of t, provided by Brown (1991: 168), we can come to a critical value of 3.745 with the following details: \( df = N - 1 = 25 - 1 = 24 \); \( \alpha = .001 \); two-sided test. (This is a two-sided test because the researcher did not hypothesize any direction to the difference in the mean scores stated in the null hypothesis).

6. If the obtained value does not exceed the critical value, then the null hypothesis is the most attractive explanation. The observation based on the sample data is not extreme enough to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between the two testings. The null hypothesis that there is no difference between the two means is the most attractive explanation. This is not our case.

7. If the obtained value is more extreme than the critical value, the null hypothesis cannot be accepted. After applying the data analysis procedures presented in the previous section and using the statistics given in table 4 (pre-post test) above, we can compute the \textit{t value} of the t-test, which equals 4.684. As the level of significance at which the hypothesis was being tested is \( .001 \), and the critical value needed for the rejection of the null hypothesis for a two-tailed test is 3.745, we can easily see that the obtained value of 4.684 exceeds the critical value of 3.745. Here we can come to an important conclusion: we can reject the null hypothesis; that is, there exists a difference in the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test, and this difference is significant.

The data collected from the pre-test and post-test has been analyzed and described above. We will now refer to the second source, students’ logs, where meaningful information regarding the experimental study was extracted.

\textbf{3.1.2. Data collected from student logs}
As stated in the design of the portfolio assessment program, its primary purpose is to develop student reading skills. More specifically, in this program, the following five skills were focused on: reading for main ideas, reading for specific information, understanding vocabulary from context, making inferences, and summarizing. We would now look into students’ feedback on the impact of this portfolio program on their reading skills mentioned above. Although there was abundant evidence, due to the limited size of the research, only typical ones will be quoted.

In the first two weeks, reading for main ideas was the target reading skill to be acquired. When assessing student logs, we came across the following piece of writing and found it really worth reporting.

- *I saw my friends do the task. They read the headings, and then read carefully the whole text from the beginning to the end. They did not know how to catch key words which related to the headings. Obviously their skimming skill is not very good. I showed them the way to do this kind of exercise and underlined some key words for them so that they could find the main idea of each paragraph.*

- *At first my score for this type of exercise was terribly low. I only got 5 out of 10. But for the second time I did it a lot better. Now I am more confident with finding main ideas. When I read a text, I look for key words in a sentence, read the first or the last sentence of a paragraph, and then I can figure out its main ideas.*

For exercises regarding understanding vocabulary from context, students reflected on different types of context clues in guessing the meaning of new words.

- *After the first lesson, I am now used to relying on different context clues when guessing the meaning of new words. I find it easier with synonym and contrast clues, but sometimes when the context is not so clear, I have to use common sense or background*
knowledge. This is when I find it the most difficult. What makes me feel the happiest with is that now I no longer have to resort to my dictionary whenever I come across a new word.

- I often base on the signal words showing different types of context clues to guess the meaning of a new word. Words that show contrast, definition, and examples are easy to recognize.

Making inferences and drawing conclusions was perceived as a difficult reading skill. Some reflected on their problems when doing this type of exercise.

- The problem I got this week is the lack of concentration. After skimming and scanning the text, I came to the right information, but as I did not read carefully for full understanding, I got the wrong implication. My score is only 6.

- I think my weak point in doing this type of exercise is that I often impose my background knowledge on arriving at an implication without paying attention to the author’s real implication. That’s why my implication is often wrong. I’ll try to read more carefully next time.

Similar to making inferences and drawing conclusions, summarizing is also seen as a difficult skill. However, from student logs, it is learned that they possessed a good skill of doing this type of exercise.

- My score for the first summarizing exercise was not good; I just got 5 answers correct out of 10. After the group discussion, I realized that it was because I did not pay attention to grammar when doing this type of summary cloze text: I did not figure out what word form should go into the blanks. As a result, I picked up the wrong word given in the list. However, after applying the teacher’s tips for doing this type of
exercise, for the second summarizing exercise, I got 8 answers correct. I’m very happy because to me, summarizing is always a difficult skill.

- My tip in doing this type of exercise is to look for synonyms or paraphrases of the original word. I also look at restatements, they are very useful signals. I shared this with my group and they all agreed with me.

Apart from the primary purpose of improving student reading skills, another objective of this program was to help students reflect on their own learning progress, hence self-assessment skills. All of these points were also clearly reflected in student logs.

- This week, I have grown up a lot. I’m not afraid of doing my friends’ exercises. I find it interesting each time I met a different student with a different type of exercise. I take it as a challenge I have to overcome... Looking back all the things I have done, I’ve got some achievements:
  - have better understanding in learning
  - get more tactics for doing reading exercises
  - improve the speed of reading
  - have more chances to practice being a teacher (collecting the right type of exercise) and being a learner (finding good strategies to do a certain type of exercise)
  - get on well with my friends

- Now I can say that my English reading skill has improved very much. For the first exercises, I only had average marks. But step by step, my scores are getting higher (...). Now I can use time and speed in control. In the previous semester, I had to spend from 30 to 40 minutes for a reading text. Now it takes me only about 20 minutes to do a text of the same difficulty.
- It’s clear that I’ve got some advances during the time doing Portfolio. I have had the skill of identifying and collecting the right type of exercises: from finding main ideas, reading for specific information, to making inferences and summarizing. I realize that this improvement will be useful for my future job of being a teacher.

- For exercises of finding main ideas, I use ‘skimming’. For reading for details, ‘scanning’ definitely the right strategy. For others like making inferences and drawing conclusions, summarizing, and understanding vocabulary in context, I think more than one strategy is required. In fact, we need ‘reading for full understanding’.

Apart from improvements, some students also reflected on their weaknesses in a certain type of reading skills, which shows that they reached a certain level of self-assessment skills.

- I myself have found out my weak points, I mean some kind of exercises that I usually got bad marks. I am not very confident with long reading texts.

- I now feel more confident when doing reading tasks. However, my weak points are vocabulary and main idea exercises. I still have some mistakes when I do ‘matching headings with paragraphs’. I still find it difficult to decide a suitable heading. And when I do vocabulary exercises, I can guess the meaning of a new word but I can’t explain it clearly.

Some students even presented quite good critical thinking skills through their reflection.

- This portfolio project has motivated us and made our reading lessons become a place for peers to share. We all realize we are more active and more responsible for what we do. Reading is no longer boring and monotonous.
What I have gained the most from this portfolio project is my awareness of self-study. Now I know how to collect the right type of exercise to improve a particular skill that I am not yet good at. I have become a lot more independent.

Some others reported the good and long-term influences of this program on their studying habit.

Doing portfolio now has become my routine. I love it! It encourages me to go to the library more often and read, and search, and read again till I have caught something worthy. I get interested in reading everything, from an ad on T.V to the brand name of the coke I often drink. It’s a good habit, isn’t it? In my mind, reading now doesn’t mean that I go to school, sit at the desk and do exercised my teacher hands out. Reading is more than that.

To sum up, we found out that student feedback on this program is very positive. On their reflection, most of them said that they are happy with this 15 week and would like to continue studying reading under this new method in the future.

3.2. Discussion of research questions

The discussion below will be presented in response to the research questions stated earlier in the paper, and the answers for these questions came from the results of the data analysis above.

3.2.1. What is the relation between the portfolio assessment experimental project and students’ reading skills?

As can be seen in table 11, the result of the t-test shows a significant difference between the mean score of the pre-test and that of the post-test. Precisely, the results were significant at the .001 level (t24 = 4.684, p < .001) in which 24 represents the number of degree of freedom, 4.684 is the obtained value, or the value resulted from applying the t-test to the data of the
study (this value exceeds the critical value of 3.745), $p$ represents probability, and $.001$ represents the level of significance.

Basing on this outcome, we can reject the hypothesis stated at the first step of the procedures for carrying out a t-test. From this rejection, a number of conclusions can be made about the experimental study. First, there is a difference in the mean score of the pre-test and that of the post-test. Second, the statement of equality (reflecting chance) in the null hypothesis is not the most attractive explanation for any differences that were found (Salkind, 2006:173). The difference in the mean scores signals that there are improvements in the group A’s reading proficiency over the 15-week experimental period. These statements are true of the samples selected from the population of the study.

As stated in Salkind (2006: 171), the t-test for dependent means is one kind of inferential test, and “what inferential statistics does best is allow decisions to be made about population based on the information about samples”, we can make inferences based on the statistics we have gained so far. We can safely infer that the improvements on group A’s reading proficiency were also applicable to the whole population of the study i.e., the second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU. Given the same experimental treatment over the same period of time under the same condition, they would make the same progress. In other words, we can say that there existed a positive relationship between the portfolio assessment project and the reading proficiency of the second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU.

Though it might be argued that some other external factors might have been involved in the progress of student reading skills, say, maturity over time, we can safely confirm that the post-treatment gains are not due to chance but to the experimental treatment. To be more precise, the likelihood that the t-value would result from chance alone is less than $.001$ (or 1 out of 1000) on any one test of the null hypothesis Salkind (2006: 171).
To conclude, we can confirm that the relation between the portfolio assessment program and students’ reading proficiency is positive. Strong gains in students’ reading skills are evident in their reading scores on the post-test, which indicates that reading portfolios can feed through to and strengthen learners’ reading competency.

3.2.2. What is the progress, if any, as perceived by the students, in developing their reading skills?

In general students’ feedback on the impacts of this project was quite positive. A careful look at the students’ logs suggests that the portfolio assessment reading program brought about improvements in the participants’ targeted reading skills. Of all the skills reflected on, reading for main ideas appeared to see the biggest improvement. It is strongly evident that most students knew they need to skim the text for key words and read the first or the last sentences of each paragraph in order to work out the main ideas of a reading text.

Understanding vocabulary in context also showed a great advance. This is clearly noticeable in the student logs that they all applied different types of context clues in tackling a new word. Definitions, synonyms, antonyms, example clues, and signal words made it much easier for them to figure out the meaning of the new words. However, many reflected on their difficulties when it comes to contexts which are not clearly shown. In this case they had to base on common sense or the general meaning of the sentences to arrive at the true meaning of the new words.

Making inferences and drawing conclusions appeared to be the most challenging skill. Most students complained on the confusion between answer choices, saying that they often chose the implications which sound obviously true but later turned out to be the wrong choice. This is because they did not base on the information in the texts; they based on their common sense or background knowledge to come at a conclusion.
Summarizing, as opposed to the researcher’s anticipation, did not pose much threat to the students. In fact, for cloze exercises, they showed good awareness of the importance of analyzing word forms in order to put the right words into the blanks. Some even paid a lot of attention to words in the summary which are paraphrases or synonyms of the key words in the text as they knew these words are highly likely the right information.

We did not collect much feedback on reading for details possibly because scanning did not appear to cause any difficulties to the participants. In fact, when reading students’ portfolios, it was learnt that their scores on this type of exercise were remarkably high.

It is obvious that strong gains in student reading skills are important, but the researcher thinks that gains in students’ awareness of their own learning are more important. It is noteworthy to the researcher that the majority of the students reported what they gained the most from this program is their realization of the right types of exercises and more notably, the appropriate strategies for dealing with such types.

Apart from the improvements in the students’ targeted reading skills, students also reflected on the positive influences of this program on their self-study skill. Many said that due to this experiment, they now have developed a reading habit, both in and outside class. What is more, they not only read books, stories, but also anything that they come across in their daily life such as advertisements and signs.

Also, many participants showed good self-assessment skills with critical evaluation on their strength and weaknesses. In fact, they are well aware of which type of exercises they are particularly good at. This is important in the way that once students are conscious of their drawbacks, they can find ways to tackle their problems.

What the research found very happy with was the students’ increased motivation in studying the reading skill, which had been seen as long and monotonous before they participated in this
experiment. It is really worth every effort especially when their feeling of joy and inspiration was conveyed in their reflections.

In general, all of the participants in this experimental study mentioned its good impacts on their reading skills. They also reflected on other improvements on their reading habit, self-study and self-assessment skills. Many found this program motivating. Others even realized that it had prepared them for their future job of being a teacher.

In conclusion, the discussion of the two research questions leads us to a confirmation that the program produced good effects on student reading proficiency. The improvements were clearly evident in two types of data: the result of the t-test and the verbal reports extracted from student logs. This important conclusion will lead us to the next part of this paper: implications and suggestions for further research.
CHAPTER 4: IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1. Evaluation of the study

As the topic of this study is the application of portfolio assessment in teaching the reading skill, the evaluation of its results will be discussed according to the main points in the portfolio design mentioned in the literature review. More specifically, we will be looking at portfolio purposes, contents, procedures, and assessment under some strengths and weaknesses.

In the first place, a number of difficulties arose in the course of implementing the research. Regarding the primary purpose of the portfolio i.e., improving student reading skills, making inferences and drawing conclusions appeared to be the skill that showed the least improvement. Reading through student reflections, we found out that this is mainly because they did not have good strategies in dealing with this type of reading exercise.

While carrying out portfolio procedures, the students reported on their difficulties in choosing appropriate reading materials regardless of the ‘material evaluation checklist’ provided at the very beginning step: introducing portfolio assessment to students. Due to the limited time (10 minutes for each exercise), the selected materials turned out to be too difficult or too easy at times. At first, the researcher was very worried that this inappropriateness in level of text difficulty may not lead to learning progress. But later, she found that she was wrong since after some group discussions, reflections, and teacher-student conferences, students themselves found out ways to choose the right materials. This change is actually a remarkable gain to students, and it eventually meets the last purpose of the portfolio assessment: encourage material searching skills.

Assessment posed the biggest threat in evaluating student portfolios! First, in terms of self-assessment, writing reflections caused both students and the researcher considerable difficulties. Students had a hard time writing the first several reflections. In fact, these writings did not provide any response concerning their learning process or progress; they just simply
stated their feelings for this very new program. When the problem had been detected, some adjustments were made by reinforcing the suggested questions for writing reflections, and this solution proved to be effective.

Also perceived as a challenge in the issue of assessment is teacher workload. This job was found to be very time-consuming! Assessing 25 students’ selected reading exercises, their performance on those materials and their reflections every week was actually a lot of work. Arranging time for teacher-student conferences was also not easy. Though to compensate, the experimenter had students’ increased motivation and involvement in their learning. She gained these at the expense of other jobs. This is a problem that hopefully will be tackled more effectively in future studies.

Strengthening validity and reliability for portfolio assessment is what was found the most demanding of all. As stated in literature review, Moya and O’Malley (1994) suggest two ways to do this: (a) studying the relationship between conclusions from portfolio information and conclusions from objective data, e.g., standardized test scores; (b) studying the relationship between conclusions from portfolio information and teacher judgment, we started our journey by choosing measures that are recognized as valid and reliable because we are going to base important decisions on the results. In this program, three types of measures were employed; they were self-assessment (by writing reflections), standardized tests (pre-experiment and post-experiment tests), and teacher assessment (by rating scales). In this context, both traditional assessment (standardized test) and alternative assessment (reflections, teacher assessment) were applied; therefore, it can be confirmed that the results collected from portfolio assessment are valid and reliable. In short, despite some difficulties encountered in the course of implementing the experimental project, the researcher could ensure the program’s validity and reliability.

Besides those difficulties encountered in the course of conducting the research, there are some limitations that this experiment has not yet overcome since it is the first research of the writer.
First, although the study succeeded in achieving its primary purpose of improving students’ reading proficiency, it has not yet been able to identify which variables directly affect the students’ performance. Was it due to the increased amount of reading materials, or was it because of the reflections students wrote every week, or was it for any other factors else? Second, as portfolio assessment is normally a longitudinal work (Moya and O’Malley, 1994), this experiment should have lasted longer, at least over two semesters, so that the observed results would be more exact. Unfortunately, it was not possible for the researcher to prolong the experiment due to time constraints. Finally, due to its small scope of the target subjects (second year English major students at DEALC, CFL, VNU), the outcomes of the research might not be applicable when the subjects enter a new level of proficiency, say, semester five or six. Those limitations will be later taken into consideration in the next part, suggestions for further studies.

Despite the limitations we have discussed so far, the study was generally successful. The researcher has gained the first and foremost purpose of the portfolio design, which was to equip students with background knowledge of the five reading skills and help them develop those skills known as reading for main ideas, reading for specific information, understanding vocabulary from context, making inferences, and summarizing. This evidence of learning can be easily found in (1) their performance on reading exercises collected by peers in group, (2) their reflections written every two weeks, and (3) their portfolio grade. In general, student scores on reading tasks fluctuated around 7.75 points, which is quite satisfactory. Reading through student reflections, it was very delighted to find that most of them reported on their awareness of how many reading skills there are and which strategies are appropriate for such skills. The researcher thinks that reading proficiency first begins with good awareness of the ‘what’ and then the ‘how’. In this light, it can be concluded that the study was successful. It is not an exaggeration to say that the students in the experimental class enjoyed much more effective learning progress than their peers in other classes. It was a pity that additional credits could not be given to students who participated in the program because this is only an experimental study and because there has been no such privilege at the College.
The program also achieved the second purpose in encouraging students’ self-assessment skills. In fact, the majority of the participants showed a good awareness of their strengths and weaknesses in doing a particular type of reading skills. More importantly, they presented good critical thinking when knowing how to explain to themselves the reasons for their good or bad performance on the tasks. Some students found ‘making inferences’ the most difficult skill to be mastered especially because they were often confused when it comes to multiple choice questions. In contrast, many others possessed a good skimming strategy for dealing with ‘finding main ideas’. All these worries or confidence were well reflected in student writings. In general, it was happy to find that students did engage in deliberate thought about what they had been learning and how they had been learning it. In their reflection, students took a step back from the learning process to think about their reading strategies and their progress as language learners. Such self-assessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation.

The final purpose of the study is to encourage students’ self-study habit. Though this is the least expected, the results were rather rewarding. Some students now have the habit of reading every single English text they come across. By ‘text’ here, it is meant ‘anything from a few words, to one sentence, to thousands of words comprising thousands of sentences’ (Aebersold & Field, 1997). Thus, a road sign, a piece of advertisement, or a novel is now getting more appealing to the students. Some others find going to school library to read books, magazines, or stories more meaningful than before. They have developed a reading habit. In addition to this, by having students write reflections, we actually gave them ownership in their study. After the experimental period, students reported they now know how to choose supplementary materials to boost a certain type of reading skill they are not yet good at. For experimenters, there is nothing more fulfilling than witnessing these positive impacts that the program has on the participants.
Discussions on the gains and limitations of this study bring us to the next part of the paper in which pedagogical implications will be drawn out.

4.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn out from the researcher’s experiences during this study and hopefully they can be applied in improving teaching reading to second year students at DEALC, CFL, VNU.

First of all, since portfolio assessment is a longitudinal program which involves a great amount of students’ and teachers’ work, it should be planned with care. In all the steps we have to plan, the very first and most important part is to decide on the goals. These goals will guide the selection and assessment of students’ work for the portfolio. This stage is very important because teachers have to know what their goals are in terms of what the students will be able to do. Moreover, students have to know what evidence they need to show in their portfolios.

Making everything clear to portfolio planners (i.e., portfolio purposes, contents, procedures, and assessment) is important, but making them clear to students definitely carries more weight. Therefore, introducing the idea of portfolio to students should deserve a good plan of classroom activities and time allocation. Here are some suggestions.

- Explain the word ‘portfolio’ from *portare* (carry) and *foglio* (sheet of paper).
- Show the students examples of English portfolios (including reading exercises, reflections, teacher assessment) prepared by other classes, or ideally, by your own.
- Ask students how they feel about tests, whether they always feel the test truly represents what they know and can do with the language (they invariably bring up plenty of problems with traditional tests).
- Tell them you are going to assess them in a fairer way, which will show the many different skills, knowledge and ideas they have acquired: lead to portfolio assessment.
It is apparent that the clearer the portfolio introductions can be made, the less time will be spent on this time-consuming work.

To help ensure the quality of the reading exercises collected by students, it is a good idea to provide them with some guidelines in choosing the right type of materials. The most important criterion is level appropriateness. If students cannot decide for themselves whether a reading text is at their current level, they can resort to ready-made books which are full of exercises at their level. In this context, books at intermediate level will definitely work!

Since assessment often causes a lot of complications to both students and teachers, it should be made clear and comprehensible right at the planning stage. When criteria for assessment have been made, it is necessary to find a way to measure whether and to what extent students have reached the objectives. In other words, it is important to define quality and quantity. To do this the researcher used rating scales. There are different types of scales, for example, checklists, number ratings, descriptive words, analytic, and holistic. Teachers need to choose a scale that reflects their purpose and works with their criteria. In each case, of course, they will need to determine what constitutes each rating. For example, they would need to make it clear what determines a rating of ‘usually’ or ‘poor’.

To get rid of the tiredness and the great amount of time arisen from assessment work, teachers can make full use of other sources of assessment such as self-assessment and peer-assessment. Studies show that self-assessment is often accurate, so we can trust this source. Besides, evaluations from peers, at least by having two friends assess the performance of the same student, can also be trustworthy and therefore will save a lot of work.

In short, in doing this study, the researcher can discover how students have learnt and progressed and gained tremendous teaching experiences. As university lecturers, the researcher also acquires plenty of research experiences with which further studies in this field
can be carried out. Hopefully, some day this research problem would be re-examined but under a new or a deeper angle. The suggestions for further researches will be presented in the next section.

4.3. Suggestions for further studies

With the one-semester period for this M.A thesis, the researcher has decided to narrow the topic into ‘the application of portfolio assessment to teaching reading skills to second year students’. Given longer time, she would wish to carry out further studies on other related subjects. Below are a number of directions in which further studies follow.

In the first direction, researchers could develop this study from some areas within it. Portfolio assessment and the role of learner reflections, teacher portfolios in teaching reading skills, applying self-assessment in teaching reading skills, etc. can be interesting research issues to follow up on. Of equal interest, an experimental research could be carried out on the application of portfolio assessment in assessing students’ reading proficiency. This means experimenters would compare traditional assessments (i.e. standardized tests) with alternative assessments (i.e. portfolio assessment) to see which one is more effective.

Another direction to carry out further studies from this research is examining the application of portfolio assessment into the teaching of speaking, which has not been investigated widely and officially in our teaching context.

Finally, to reach a higher reliability, in the future the researcher wishes to have a chance to carry out this research under true experimental conditions in which random sampling can be ensured and participants can be divided into experimental group and control group.

These research subjects are what the researcher thinks should be continued after the study. Hopefully the study is of great interest and would raise some other interesting research inquiries. Then the quality of teaching and learning would be improved.
Part C: Conclusions

The study on the application of portfolio assessment in teaching reading to second year students at College of Foreign Languages is one of the first researches of its scope to be realized in the college and in Vietnam. What gave fresh impetus for the researcher is the current trend in ESL, shifting from product assessment to process assessment with portfolio being increasingly cited as a viable method; the little research on the use of portfolio assessment in ESL; and the urge of the researcher’s teaching situation to find a new assessment instrument for the reading skill, which has long been regarded as boring and monotonous. For such reasons, the experimental research was carried out with its main purposes to measure the effectiveness of portfolio assessment in the reading period, and to draw out some pedagogical implications from the results of such an experiment.

The research could not have been complete without theoretical background reviewed in chapter 2. Issues concerning definitions of reading, taxonomy of reading skills, and reading assessment have been discussed. More specifically, the researcher has looked at ways to assess reading comprehension, including traditional methods and alternative ones, from which portfolio assessment is the main focus. In this big topic, the study has reviewed some characteristics of portfolio assessment and necessary steps in portfolio procedures which were offered in previous studies. The review of these procedures was a strong back-up for the realization of this study.

The whole research was conducted over a period of 15 weeks, starting with the selection of 25 students as experimental samples. From week 2 to 14 was the application of the experimental treatment: the portfolio assessment program. Data regarding student performance before and after the experiment were collected from compared results of the pre-test and the post-test, and student reflections. The t-test results obtained show that there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the two tests, implying that this difference was not due to chance, but to the portfolio assessment project. From the second source, students’ reflections, the data
also showed significant gains in their reading skills known as finding main ideas, reading for details, understanding vocabulary from context, and summarizing. Making inferences and drawing conclusions was not perceived to be improved very much, though.

An overall evaluation of this study reveals that ultimately it succeeded in achieving its stated objectives. In general, students’ reading proficiency has been increased, though not all of the five targeted skills enjoy the same level of improvement. Moreover, students now have known how to reflect on their learning progress by assessing their own strengths and weaknesses. This is particularly important for encouraging self-study habits among students, which is also an achievement that the study has brought to many participants.

Basing on the limitations as well as the positive outcomes of this experiment, pedagogical implications have been yielded. The most important step in portfolio assessment procedure is introducing this idea to students. Equipping them with good theoretical background on portfolio assessment and samples of student portfolio would definitely get them ready for their real task. To help reduce complications associated with assessment, portfolio criteria should be made clear and comprehensible right at the beginning by using rating scales. Hopefully, these suggestions would bring about a better conduct of the portfolio assessment program in ESL classrooms.

There are also other directions for further studies basing on this research, which have been discussed in chapter 4 of this paper. Last but not least, as this is the first study on portfolio assessment done by the researcher, shortcomings are unavoidable. Any constructive comments would be highly appreciated so that it would be improved.