

# Importance of working with the student digital portfolio for the writing skills development in the english language

## Importancia de trabajar con los estudiantes el portafolio digital para desarrollar la destreza de escritura en el idioma inglés

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**Abstract:** This paper describes a significant experience about how to be worked a digital portfolio with the students of fifth semester of Bilingual Secretarial School from Technical University of Babahoyo. This was of great help to develop the linguistic competences of the English language and at the same time, it strengthened the writing skill because of students wrote detailed each class scenario as much as in and out of it with their respective activities. Apart from strengthening writing skills, this helps the development of critical thinking, reflection and even more, allows students to root their own learning by becoming highly active actors in the learning process. Finally, this research shows how the digital portfolio should be worked and how it should be assessed by students and teachers.

**Keywords** – *Linguistic competence, CLIL, portfolio, assessment, writing skill.*

**Resumen:** Este trabajo de investigación describe una significativa experiencia sobre cómo fue trabajado un portafolio digital con los estudiantes del Quinto semestre de la carrera Secretariado Ejecutivo Bilingüe de la Universidad Técnica de Babahoyo. Esto fue de gran ayuda porque permitió desarrollar las competencias lingüísticas del lenguaje Inglés y en especial fortaleció la destreza de escritura debido a que los estudiantes escribieron detalladamente cada escenario de clase tanto como dentro y fuera de ella con sus respectivas actividades. Aparte de fortalecer la destreza de escritura, esto ayuda al desarrollo del pensamiento crítico, reflexión y aún más, permite a los estudiantes a raizar su propio aprendizaje convirtiéndoles en actores sumamente activos dentro del proceso de aprendizaje. Finalmente, esta investigación muestra como el portafolio digital debe ser trabajado y como debe ser evaluado por los estudiantes y docentes.

**Palabras clave** – *Competencia lingüística, CLIL, portafolio, evaluación, destreza de escritura.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This research work was carried out in Commercial English IV subject from Technical university of Babahoyo to students of eighth semester of Bilingual Executive Secretarial School. This subject is taught in the second language based on business content, how to make and respond the different correspondences, how to handle a business meeting, that is, they are capable of covering fundamental bases for the operation of any public or private company (Universidad Tècnica de Babahoyo, 2019).

Considering the general objective that Bilingual secretarial school has, it always empathizes to improve the mechanisms and strategies of academic evaluation and internship training for students, is for that reason that this subject firstly takes into account work based on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated learning) approach. Marsh (2002) mentioned that CLIL covers “any dual-focused educational context in which an additional language, thus not usually the first foreign language of the learners involved, is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content” (p.15); so regarding that Business subject has been taught through content and language using the second language. Clil approach gives a host of alternatives to teach and it is for that reason that the development of this subject was considered the portfolio evaluation as one of the criteria to be treated during the teaching-learning process with the purpose students write each class how it was taught so they develop writing skill for their permanent contact with writing. At the end of each term, learners are evaluated with a final exam about 40% which includes theoretical and practical content taking into account the four linguistic skills. “It permits to develop learner’s full ability to communicate in the L2. On the other hand, ... the integration of four skills to build discourse competence for communicative purpose” (Usó & Martinez, 2006, p. 4).

On the other hand, the portfolio evaluation is about 60% due to it collect all work done in class and autonomous work. Among the works that the students must include in their portfolio are basically: collections of exercises per skills, practice reports, written and oral lessons, group work, partial exam and final exam. In addition, each class must be explicitly described indicating what happened in each activity and detail these sequentially. It allows to students to get involved frequently in the second language covering content, vocabulary, phrasal verbs, grammar and overall performance.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to mention what portfolio means in education and with the contribution of Thomas (1998) who pointed out “the term portfolio learning has come to mean the collection of evidence that learning has taken place. In practice portfolios include documentation of learning and an articulation of what has been learned” (Thomas, 1998, p. 192). He also said that it is also significant as assessment tools because it has “one form of authentic assessment that looks at performance and practical application of theory” (Thomas, 1998). It is worth to say that portfolio is not a new tool considered in education due to Thomas indicates that it was considered many years ago but was more worked in Medical area because students performed clinical performance practice. In recent times, the portfolio tool teaches us how to work, what to consider in it and finally how to evaluate with the purpose of development critical thinking, metacognitive awareness and reflection based on the learning of specific

knowledge and this in turn triggers a number of materials that have been collected or produced by teachers and students.

Regarding an important statement indicated by Sigal (2007) makes known that “En el trabajo con portafolios el alumno atraviesa un proceso de reflexión, hecho que contribuye al desarrollo de la conciencia meta cognitiva y la construcción de sus conocimientos” it occurs at the moment that students write each class What was taught and how was worked including all activities done and students and teachers participations. The simple fact of repeat and repeat the exercises of Writing and Speaking, it leaves traces in the students' progress.

Moya and Malley (1994) exposed on their paper research the characteristics that must cover a portfolio never mind in what subject will be worked. They notified that “Five features typify model portfolios that can be used as a systematic assessment tool in instructional planning and student evaluation. Each of these features has implications for ESL classrooms” (Moya and Malley, 1994, p. 2). First, Comprehensiveness is related to determine the depth and breadth of a student's capabilities realized through the data collection and analysis produced by students. It also permits the development of second language, the metacognitive process through reflection and the close relationship between student, teacher and goals of learning. Second, portfolio must be Predetermined and Systematic with the purpose to provide neat and clear information according to planning of content of syllabus. Third, it should also be Informative providing useful and meaningful information for teachers, students, and people outside work even more important because it is built “In ESL settings, a portfolio can be particularly useful to communicate specific examples of student work to students, to parents, and to other teachers” (Moya and Malley, 1994, p. 3). Fourth, tailored is as well considered important inside the characteristics of portfolio because it should be fit to comply the classroom goals, objectives and the assessment based on student needs. Fifth, Authentic is the most important base for doing a real portfolio which it was done considering a countless of activities of Commercial English VI subject among them are classroom activities, individual tasks, cooperative learning groups, language tasks, etc. all of them were done keeping mind the holistic and integrative methods with the purpose of development communicative and functional language.

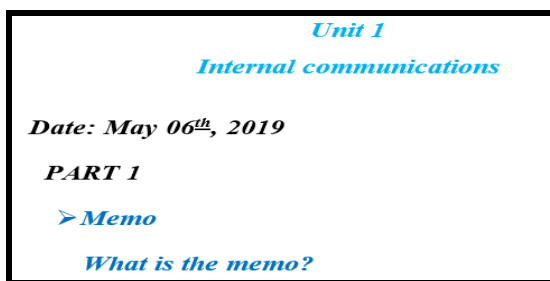
In other ways, the organization of content in a portfolio must be considered quite important including some elements such as “fijación de objetivos, guías para el alumno, categorías de inclusión de temas, estructura del portafolio, encuentros docente - alumno, etc.” (Sigal, 2007). About objectives, they are fixed by unit in the syllabus, themes and subtopics should be always mentioned per class, portfolio structure should be the same format for everyone, meeting between teachers and students should be mentioned inside the portfolio, too. All of them must be specified sequentially to facilitate the evaluation by the teacher and because it is also reflected in the Portfolio Rubric.

## **METHODOLOGY**

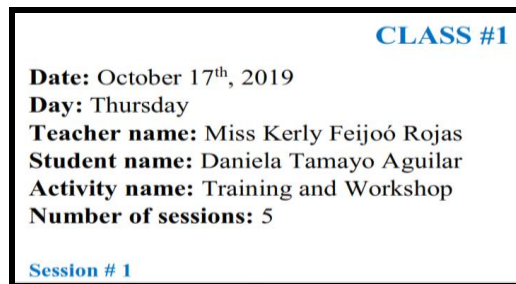
The development of this research will be based on explaining and evidencing how the students of Commercial English VI subject worked their portfolios during the process of teaching-learning during the academic period April to September 2019. Although, there is no structural limitation on what exact contents should have it, at the beginning of semester, teacher explained that portfolio should have a heading, description of the all activities done in class and per class, collection of all tasks signed by the

teacher with corresponding date and attach them to portfolio once signed by the teacher. Additionally, it should have a cover page, index and conclusion for its final presentation but these are done a little before the presentation.

Manage a standard heading allows the teacher to locate the necessary information by unit, by themes, or by dates only in this way the teachers can achieve to certify better the learning outcomes of their learners and as also the students are an active participant into the teaching-learning process and so know what they have learned and on what date they studied such content. Below there are two examples of heading of two students who used in their portfolio:



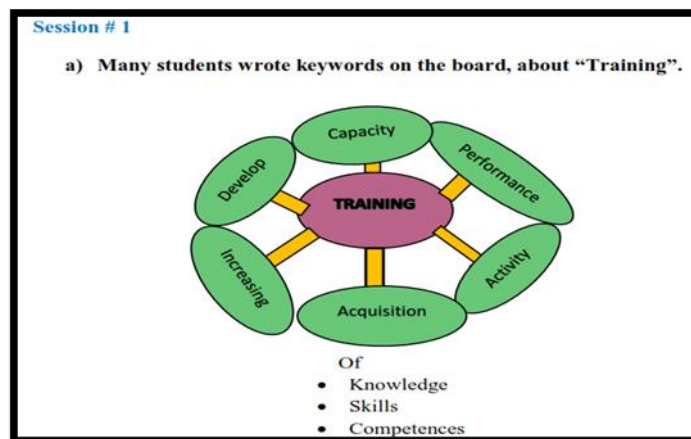
Picture1: Student A



Picture 2: Student B

**Analysis:** both students used the headings, but how we can see the picture from student A has an incomplete header and student B has a complete header, of importance to emphasize that a complete header provides clear, comprehensive and limited information. It is fairly selective at the moment that the teacher checks it.

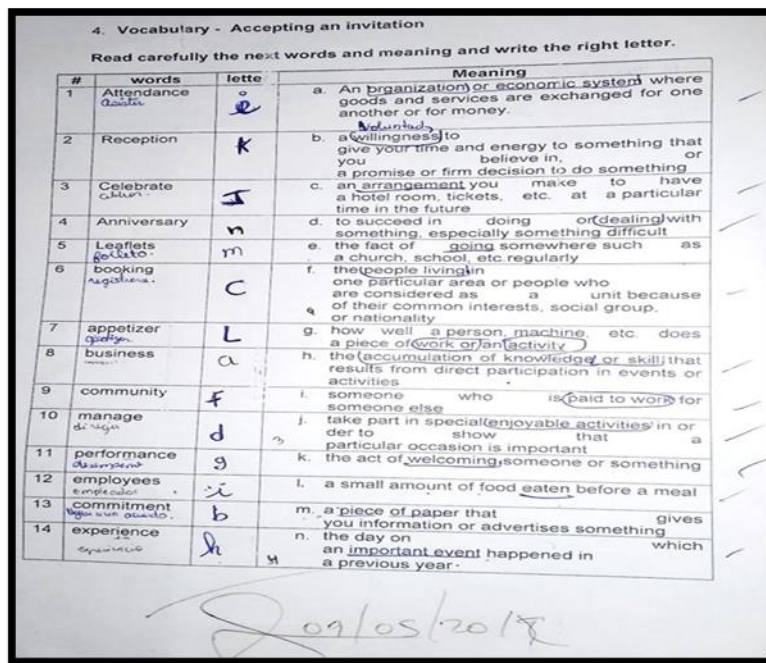
About activities done in class, students should be written explaining the name of the activity, who did it, how it was done and why it was done. It permits to consolidate the learning and so reinforce the knowledge in the second language. The picture below shows a brainstorming activity and that student has written the number of session with the description of the activity and a mind map about training.



Picture 3: Brainstorming activity

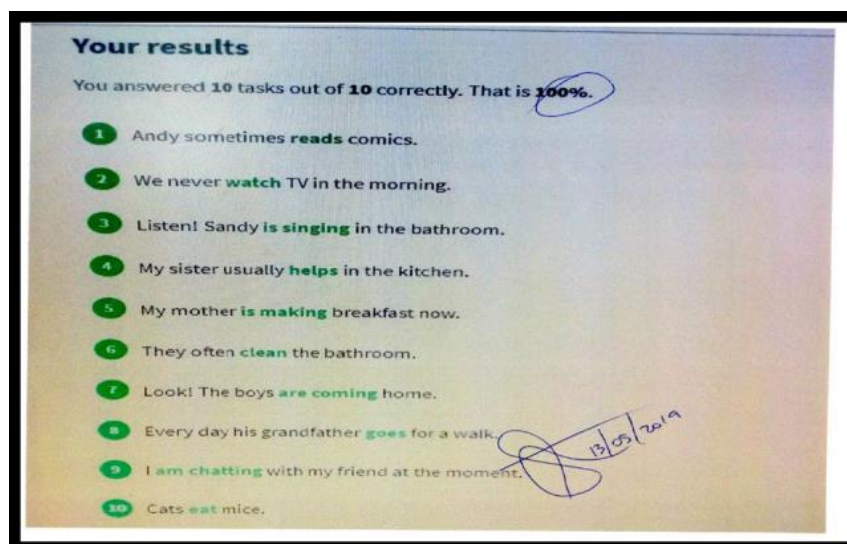
Moreover, reviewing all tasks with corresponding date help to control the exercises and observe the weaknesses and strengthen that students are presenting during their learning.

The down picture shows how a vocabulary activity “accepting an Invitation” belonged to Unit 1 was realized in class, checked and then signed by teacher:



Picture 4: Exercises of vocabulary

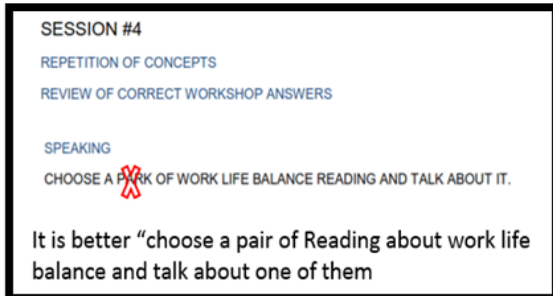
That exercises of grammar was worked at home which students should do it using Google and bring the task to class for it to be signed by their teacher and then, be attached to the digital portfolio.



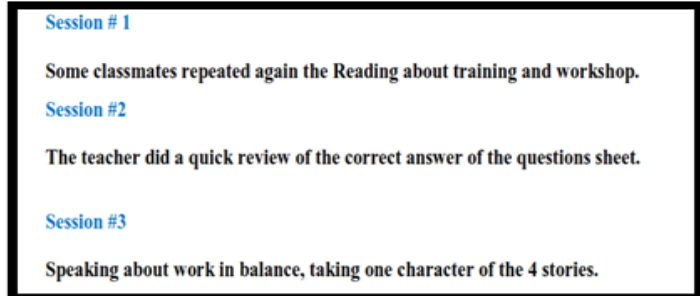
Picture 5: Exercise of grammar

In addition, each activity and each exercise realized in class should have a brief description in order to point out step by step how the activities were done and obviously, it was written using the English language. The image below indicates that picture 4 which belong student A has a general description

and no clear for a reader while picture 5 from student B details clearly what did in each session. It wants to say that student B follow the criteria of portfolio rubric and a better domain of the second language, too.



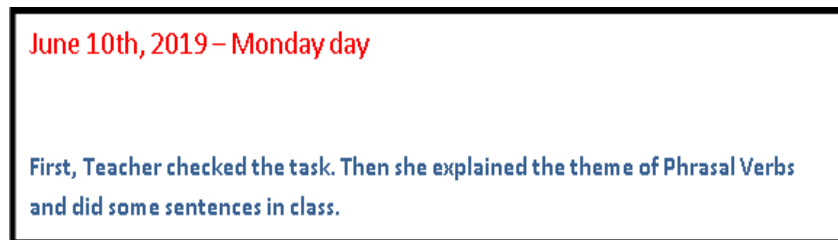
Picture 6: Detail of each session



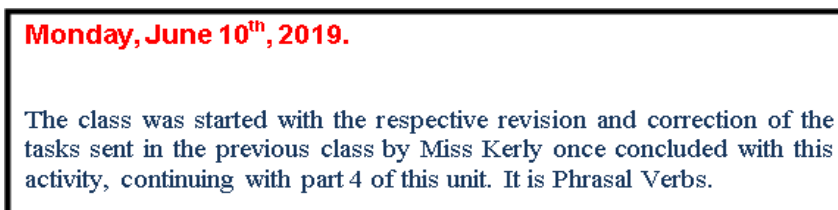
Picture 7: Detail of each session

In consequence of always take notes helps to develop the writing skill because throughout it makes use of connectors, synonyms, grammar, phrases, etc. so learners are going to expand their vocabulary in the second language. McCutchen (2011) mentioned some important in his paper research “that a central feature of the development of writing skill is the increasing fluency of linguistic processes involved in text production” and that production throughout of writing skill “share many components with oral language production, such as content selection, lexical retrieval, and syntactic processes. In contrast, transcription entails the cognitive and physical acts of forming written (as opposed to spoken)” (McCutchen, 2011, p. 54). Likewise, Bean (2011) makes a great contribution “when students write, their writing and their thinking improve.

As a writer struggle with word choice, sentence structure, and paragraph composition, thinking occurs”. It means that writing skill is associated with the development of critical thinking and it is for that reason that writing skill is considered important to work on the development of the portfolio explicitly detailing what is and how is worked each activity. Below there are two examples of description of an activity:



Picture 8: A brief description of student A



Picture 9: A brief description of student B

**Analysis:** Comparing the description between student A and student B can affirm clearly that students whether write the description per themes given in class. However, student B is more explicit in her wording than student A that means student B has more fluidity than Student A but both show the same idea and their writings are understandable in view of others.

Another point of view about learning vocabulary, teacher asked her students build their own vocabulary using a synonym and a picture per word in order to facilitate memorize those new words that then, learners will use them consciously and unconsciously, in their later writings. It contributes to lexical growth and gets an advanced level of proficiency in the second language (Agustin-LLach and Canga, 2016, p. 3). This kind of vocabulary worked is according to CLIL approach with the purpose of empowering the learning of a foreign language, it is showed below:



Picture 10: Vocabulary

That way helps students learn more significantly the vocabulary with the use of image and simultaneously they are also expanding meaning with use of synonym.

It is important to emphasize that the digital portfolio developed throughout the course and with a lot of effort on the part of the students is not simply an organizer of academic works but rather it must be subject to a quantitative evaluation in order to arouse interest in the students and assess their learning effort. According to Davis and Ponnampereuma (2005) quotes that “Evaluation of evidence provides feedback to both assessor and assessee. The assessor, by analyzing the evidence of performance in the portfolio, finds out how successful the teaching/training has been and what changes are needed for improvement” (p.3) in favour of this achievements teachers must clearly assign guidelines on how to evaluate it and also have an explicit idea of goals to be achieved by students since this represents evaluating the evaluated.

The following situation were considered in the portfolio assessment such as each work completed in class was checked and signed by the teacher before including in the students’ portfolio in their respective date, each class has a heading which consists in number of unit, date, day, teacher name, student name, activity name, number of sessions. After each session, students should add the exercises done in class and by Moodle platform, too. (see appendix 3)

After of indicated how the portfolio must be presented and organized, the teacher gave to know from first day of class to learners the portfolio rubric as an evaluation tool. Research by Andrade (1997) indicates that “A rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work, or "what counts" (for example, purpose, organization, details, voice, and mechanics are often what count in a piece of writing)” (p.1). Moreover, rubric tool must have criteria and score from excellent to poor in order to provide clear assessment and feedback to students based on it.

It is significant to highlight that with the advantage of using rubric help assess transparently what students write due to the variety of interpretation they have. Broad (2003) points out that “the discourse of participants in this study lays out several specific ways in which evaluation of portfolios differs from evaluations of single texts” (p.10). Consequently, it is beneficial and productive to manage Rubric for assessment because it guides and promotes self-reflection to students low feedback from others. The rubric used for assessing the portfolio include some details belonging to criteria as content, organization, writing, spelling, punctuation, creativity and evidences and others points belonging to score from low to high level as unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient and excellent. (See appendix4)

After all, rubric must be an indispensable tool for assessing each activity during the learning and teaching process because apart from facilitate the rating by the teacher it also contributes students focus their own efforts in producing a satisfactory job with a better score and successively feel less stressed about what grade they will get.

## DISCUSSION

This research paper highlights the importance of working a new approach of developing writing skill in the foreign language like Digital Portfolio. In favor of this, it has been worked with a group of students belonging to fifth semester of Bilingual Secretarial School. The data collection was based on diagnostic test at the beginning of class in order to know how easy they can narrate something in particular. Then, the post-test used at the end and an interview with specific interrogations which help the author to have a wider picture about this methodology.

Zakaria & Aziz (2019) points out “when students learn to write and try to complete a writing task, they are applying the theory of constructivism” (p.321). It means that through it students develop competencies of interpretation such as sounds, words and symbols. Hence, writing skill becomes in one of the most important function of communication in the human life. According to the application of pre-test and post-test, learners reflect a significant improvement in that skill because they can write with more easily, they have enriched their vocabulary and present less mistakes at the moment to narrate.

Results obtained through an interview a group of twenty students, it could be detected some positive and negative aspects about how to work Digital Portfolio. Among of positive aspects, students said that it allows to strengthen the grammar, vocabulary; improve the semantic order, structure sentences better, and help to generate more ideas. One of the negative aspects that students expressed was that speaking should be worked more that Writing because there are certain students that dislike



writing and prefer speaking, but there are very few students who like to speak more than write. As for the advantages of carrying Digital Portfolio, learners made known that it helps them to be more creative to become an organized person because they carry a logical ordering of tasks. It is also a backup of all tasks which provides them the feedback of their own work. Finally, managing a Digital Portfolio contributes to save money and protect the environment due to the fact that a file printed does not permit to do changes. In conclusion, the interview presented more positive than negative points which indicates that students are aware of the importance of developing “writing skill”.

Based on qualitative results, it can be confirmed that if the digital portfolio is worked on based on the narration of all the activities realized in class, the writing skill in the second language will be improved meaningfully. Students that develop this skill help prepare them for personal and professional success and therefore, leads to academic excellence of the Bilingual Secretarial School.

In order to improve writing skill, it would be ideal that all teachers perform this kind of methodology “Digital Portfolio” due to it confirms that students strengthen writing skill. In addition, Working "Digital portfolio" permits students to become a writer of the second language and thus, they will be safer and competitive in their professional field.

## CONCLUSION

The development of how to work the digital portfolio during this academic period belonging to 2019 with students from Bilingual Secretarial School was with the purpose to enhance little by little the writing skill in the second language, although it was a little tedious for the students because they had to be very exhaustive in the collection of evidences, organization, interpretation, and revision of task and documents before the presentation and evaluation.

Nevertheless, Learners should have an easy understanding of how to work the process of portfolio and to be aware that the most important aspiration is that they master all English language skills such as listening and reading as reception skills, writing and speaking as production skills. Developing Writing skill benefits indirectly other skills because writing the activities frequently done in class permit students to be in contact with English language and to become an analytic and critical person. Two factors are really important which help them narrate all events without any limitation of a foreign language and additionally, for their performance personal and professional.

On the contrary, teachers ought to always have on hand the Rubric to make it lighter at the moment to check Portfolio individually as well as students know in advance how they are going to be evaluated and what will be their score approximately. Each student should have printed the rubric and the teacher will review the portfolio and put the corresponding equivalent according to each standard of the rubric, and finally give the total score with a brief feedback.

To sum up, this kind of strategy about Digital Portfolio in order to develop writing skill was at the beginning fairly complicated for students because they refused to work it this way due to they had never done it before. But here is the arduous task of the teacher which consisted of planning in advance how it will be worked, what it wants to teach and how it will be evaluated. All of them must be situated

with clear and reachable goals and even one of the teacher's role is always monitoring the process of the teaching and learning and motivating his / her students in every task.

In this discipline of teaching, teachers must always be innovating in applying different kinds of strategies, techniques and methods due to it takes advantage in the birth of a new focus of teaching even with the same technique or methods.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Student's evidence

#### CLASS #3

**Date:** October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

**Day:** Thursday

**Teacher name:** Miss Kerly Feijoo Rojas

**Student name:** Daniela Tamayo Aguilar

**Activity name:** Speaking

**Number of sessions:** 3

#### Session # 1

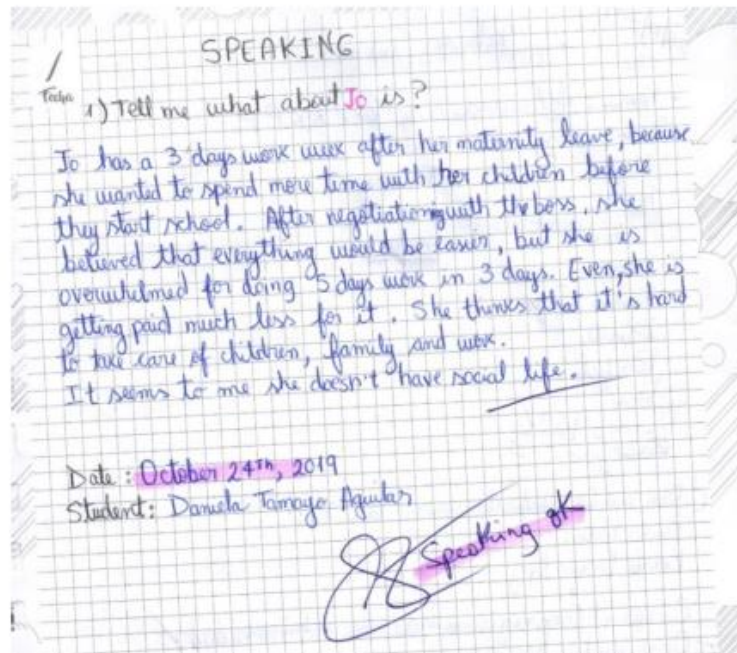
Some classmates repeated again the Reading about training and workshop.

#### Session #2

The teacher did a quick review of the correct answer of the questions sheet.


#### Session #3

Speaking about work in balance, taking one character of the 4 stories.



## Appendix 2: Moodle evidence

+ UNIT 3- ACHIEVEMENTS AND PLANS ✎



+ WHAT IS BUSINESS REPORT? ✎

+ GOING TO TENSE ✎

+ GOING TO ✎

+ VOCABULARY ✎

+ TERRIBLE DAY- AUDIO ✎

+ A DAY AT THE OFFICE- AUDIO ✎

+ LISTENING COMPREHENSION ✎

+ SURVEY STATISTICS ✎

+ ANALYSIS OF EACH QUESTION ✎

+ FINAL BUSINESS REPORT ✎

## Appendix 3: Portfolio Rubric

Criteria	Inadequate= Unsatisfactory	Adequate= Needs Improvement	Above Average= Proficient	Exemplary= Excellent	SCORE
content	Shows some thinking and reasoning but most ideas are underdeveloped and unoriginal.	Shows some thinking and reasoning but most ideas are underdeveloped and unoriginal.	Content indicates original thinking and develops ideas with sufficient	Content indicates synthesis of ideas, in depth analysis and evidences	
Organization	Writing lacks logical Organization. Serious errors.	Writing is a little Incoherent and little organized.	Writing is coherent and logically. Overall unity of ideas is present.	Writing shows high degree of attention to logic and reasoning of points.	
Writing	Students convey their knowledge and understanding with little coherence, logic, and writing is hard to read.	Students convey their knowledge and understanding with satisfactory coherence, logic.	Students convey their knowledge and understanding with moderate coherence, logic and writing is enjoyable to read.	Students convey their knowledge and understanding with exceptional coherence, logic and writing is enjoyable to read.	
Spelling, punctuation	Errors are frequent.	Some errors remain.	Essay has few errors. Very Few fragments or run-ons.	Essay is free of distracting spelling, Punctuation and grammatical errors.	
Creativity	No creativity	Little creative	Somewhat creative	Creative and original.	
Evidences	You did not use at least two relevant details.	You used two relevant details.	You used three or four relevant details.	You used all relevant details per class.	