

# Portfolio Assessment: Advantages And Disadvantages

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The concept of portfolio was adopted from the field of fine arts where portfolios are used to display illustrative samples of artist's work (Moya & O' Malley, 1994).

Portfolio assessment is the systematic collection of student work measured against predetermined scoring criteria. These criteria often take the form of scoring guides, rubrics, checklists, or rating scales (O'Malley & Valden Pierce, 1996). According to Kaczmark (1994), portfolio is a collection of samples of student work developed over time, chosen according to specific criteria, to reflect student progress and achievement, and presented with an introduction, explanation or assessment of the contents. Portfolios, like a slide show, demonstrate student achievement, rather than the snapshot of student achievement that single occasion tests provide (Gomez, 1999).

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## 1-Portfolios: Some Descriptions

Pluralizing the word *portfolio* suggests not only that there will be more than one portfolio, but that there may be more than one type of portfolio, depending on the purpose (Courts & McInerney, 1993).

### 1-1-The Nonselective Portfolio

In this kind of portfolio, all of the students' work in a given course would be collected and chronologically dated. All of the concrete evidence the students can collect to indicate their involvement in a course would be a part of these portfolios (Courts & McInerney, 1993). Courts & McInerney (1993), suggested that in this kind of portfolio:

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The teacher has access to all of the students' work and therefore has the opportunity to gain a complete perspective on the kind of work and growth that appears to be occurring. A further advantage of such portfolios is that the students have an opportunity to look at and reflect on everything that they have been doing; therefore, in such portfolios students can hardly say, "I have been doing my best and working as hard as I can ". However, students can determine for themselves which areas, processes, or concepts suggest a need for individual help or further study and thought. (p.98)

### **1-2-The Selective Portfolio**

Selective portfolios assume that a body of work exists from which something might be selected and students are able to look back on what they have produced in courses over several years (Courts & McInerney, 1993).

### **2- Self and Peer Assessments**

Brown and Hudson (1998) indicated that self-assessments require the students to rate their own language, whether through performance self-assessments, comprehension self-assessments, or observation self-assessments. Performance self-assessments required students to read a situation and decide how well they would respond in that situation. Comprehension self-assessments required students to read a situation and decide how well they would comprehend it. Observation self-assessments required students to listen to audio- or videotape recordings of their own language performance and decide how well they think they performed. Peer assessment is similar to self-assessment except that students rate the language of their peers.

The most obvious and widely used learning instrument that could be used as input for self-assessment is the portfolio (Todd, 2002). According to Todd (2002), portfolios are suitable for self-assessment because they are the evidence to the students' own effort, progress, and achievements.

Portfolio assessments may include observation and evaluation of the thinking process that the students use in arriving at a response or demonstration of knowledge and skills (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Liskin-Gasparro believed that portfolios are useful to evaluate the

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processes students use to complete a particular task. Tierney (1991; mentioned in Alabdulwahab, 2002) indicated that in such a task, students feel a commitment and involvement in evaluating themselves in learning the foreign language.

Oxford (1994; mentioned in Alabdulwahab, 2002 ) suggested that strategies form the tools for student self-directed involvement in learning. Such strategies include guessing techniques, willingness to make mistakes, looking for patterns, and taking advantage of all practice opportunities. These strategies may be necessary for novice EFL students since they tend to learn and use different unsuccessful strategies (Alabdulwahab, 2002).

Abdulwahab noted:

Vocabulary-guessing strategies are important in reading a second language that may include both familiar and unknown vocabulary items. A self-directed approach requires that learners seek the meaning of words with strategies to figure out the unknown terms and expressions. Traditionally, foreign language learners assume that knowing the meaning of every word will facilitate reading whether or not knowledge of a specific word is required. Many foreign language learners assume that knowing or looking up every word is the solution to understanding the text. However, understanding the text always requires more than single vocabulary decoding. (p. 50)

### **3-Reliability and Validity of Portfolios**

There are different views about the validity and reliability of alternative assessments. For example, Brown and Hudson (1998) indicated that the reliability and validity of alternative assessments are not ensured.

Huerta-Macias (1995) believed that alternative assessments consisted of valid and reliable procedures that avoid many of the problems inherent in traditional testing. He continued that alternative assessment represents the best of all worlds in that it looks at actual performance on real life tasks, such as writing, self-editing, reading, participation in collaborative work, and doing a demonstration in front of a group. Therefore, the procedures in and of themselves are valid.

He believed if a procedure is valid, then it is reliable in that it will consistently produce the same results if audited or replicated.

Brown and Hudson (1998) criticized the claim made by Huerta-Macias and believed that it may not be quite so universally acceptable. They argued that:

We are very concerned about the attitudes expressed above [expressed by Huerta-Macias] that somehow the consistency of alternative assessments is “ensured” by the various strategies listed and that somehow such procedures are “in and of themselves valid, due to the nature of assessment.” These statements are too general and shortsighted to fit with our experiences as decision-makers who, from lifelong habit, rely on the guidelines set forth in the *standards for educational and psychological testing* (American Psychological Association, 1985, 1986) for designing measures that will be used to make responsible decisions about students’ lives. (p.665)

Ediger (2000) believed that portfolios would not show validity statistics as compared to CRTs, in particular. When CRTs are used in schools, the accompanying objectives provide the teacher with clear benchmarks for teaching. Thus the test items on the CRT may be clearly aligned with the stated objectives. If the teacher used objectives in teaching, the validity of the test would be high. But it is more difficult to align portfolio contents with more broadly written objectives. (Ediger, 2000)

Ediger (2000) suggested,

Reliability data can be determined readily with standardized tests and CRTs. Test/retest, alternative forms, and split half reliability figures have been worked out by companies producing these tests, especially in pilot studies. Students’ test results from the local school/classroom may be compared with the norm group as given in the manual of the administered test. The printout of the student test results will provide the necessary information in comparing the test taker’s test results with the norm group. Standardized tests will have more data on validity and reliability as compared to CRTs developed on the state level. It costs much money to do pilot studies and publish the results. Commercial companies which publish standardize tests have more money available to run these studies as do statewide developed CRTs. Thus, with numerical results from testing, validity and reliability data may be computed quickly. Portfolios and their inherent contents

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prevent these specific comparisons on validity and reliability to be made. (p.3)

Ediger believed that to remedy these problems, we should use rubrics. Rubrics make the assessment of portfolios as objective as possible.

#### **4-Advantages of portfolio assessment**

Research suggests that portfolio assessment provides benefits that more traditional measures do not provide.

Portfolios provide a holistic assessment that involves thematic curriculum or the teaching of skills in the context of authentic reading or writing (O'Malley & Valden Pierce, 1996). Portfolios provide a holistic assessment that contributes to a valid measure of higher-order thinking skills (Cook-Benjamin, 2001). A whole language approach not only provides a context for learning, but also makes use of students' prior knowledge, experience, and interests. Also, it supports active construction of knowledge and provides meaning and purpose for learning and engages students in social interaction to develop both oral and written language (O'Malley & Valden Pierce, 1996).

The most important benefit in portfolios is learner reflection. Santos (1997) maintained that reflection in portfolios benefits both learners and teachers. By having reflection as part of the portfolio process, students think about their needs, goals, weakness, and strengths in language learning (Coombe & Barlow, 2004). The students are also asked to select their best work and to explain why that work was beneficial to them. Learner reflection helps students to examine their efforts and the consequences of their study. It enhances feelings of learner ownership. It also increases opportunities for dialogue between students and teachers about curriculum goals and learner progress (Coombe & Barlow, 2004). According to Murphy (1998), reflection helps students learn how to learn. The students know themselves as learners better than anyone else and they set goals for themselves and evaluate their learning with more detail and introspection.

Reflection in portfolios has some benefits for teachers. Murphy (1998, p.3) indicated that, " when reflection is public and interactive, it opens normally hidden mental activities to introspection." Teachers gain insights into their students' thinking. Therefore, it helps teachers to investigate students' difficulty and a means to identify appropriate instruction.

The following list indicates some of the advantages of portfolios:

1. Portfolios provide student growth over time. They provide continuity, integration, and a record of overall progress (Fenwick & Parsons, 1999).
2. Portfolios link assessment with instruction. In other words, student performance is evaluated in relation to instructional goals, objectives and classroom activities (O'Malley & Valden Pierce, 1996).
3. Portfolios provide a direct measure of students' performance (shinn, 1989; cited in Cole & Struyk, 1997).
4. Portfolios can reveal for the students and faculty the processes of learning that are hidden in traditional assessment methods (Mullin, 1998).
5. Portfolios provide a means for addressing the problems of fairness in grading. They also provide insights into students' performance (Mullin, 1998). For instance, as Mullin (1998) indicated, portfolios can show " (1) the amount of work students have been willing to engage in, (2) the thinking processes they used to transform information over time, (3) their ability to revise their work based on peer and instructor corrections and suggestions, and (4) their development in a discipline" (p.80)
6. Enhancing the teacher's role is another advantage of portfolios since they can provide teachers with clearer picture of student growth, change the role of the teacher to that of a coach, and provide insights into the progress of each individual student (Brown & Hudson, 1998).

7. Having completed portfolios, students may feel a sense of accomplishment because they can see the growth they have achieved and the areas in which they need improvement (Cook-Benjamin, 2001).
8. Portfolios allow students to have some control over the assessment process, to demonstrate in their own terms what they can do, to compare and contrast their earlier efforts with more recent work, and to set their own goals (Liu, 2003).
9. “Systematic self-reflection. This is personal in nature and is the external presentation or articulation of an inner dialogue a professional maintains with her/himself” (Korthagen & Wubbels, 1995; cited in Smith & Tillema, 2001, p. 187 ).
10. In portfolio assessment, students learn from their mistakes if there is a reflective dialogue based on self-reflection on experiences (Smith & Tillema, 2001).
11. Maintaining a reflective dialogue with peers (Smith & Tillema, 2001).
12. Portfolios encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning and to become autonomous learners (Liu, 2003).
13. It can be said that portfolios are used to serve the development of an increased sense of democracy, in that teachers and students worked together to read, respond, and understand student texts (Yancey, 1998; cited in Liu, 2003).
14. In portfolio assessment, teaching, learning, and assessment are together as mutually supportive activities, while in traditional standardized testing, teaching and learning are separated from curriculum and assessment (Liu, 2003).

15. Student involvement is an important aspect of portfolios because when students themselves determine the purpose of a learning experience, their sense of self-efficacy academic achievement, motivation and intrinsic interest in the subject matter is increased (Cole & Struyk, 1997).

16. Portfolios enhance self-regulated learning. According to Murphy (1998), learners who have learning "under their control" are known as self regulated. The reflection element in portfolios help students be aware of what strategies are available to them and understand how the strategies operate. Students understand when the strategies should be applied.

### **5-Disadvantages and Barriers of Portfolio Assessment**

Despite the demonstrated usefulness of portfolio assessment, several problems surrounding portfolio assessment were reported.

One of the most frequent problems instructors had in using portfolios was the difficulty many students had in adjusting to an ungraded system (Weiser, 1992; cited in Liu, 2003). The evaluation system with which the students are familiar is based on grades. The students may suffer anxiety when work is ungraded (Liu, 2003). There may have been some conflicts between portfolio assessment approaches and learners traditional values. According to Liu (2003), the students of some countries such as China, Japan and Korea may have been more comfortable with a teacher-centered approach, where they knew clearly what the teachers expected of them; they may not have been accustomed to the concepts of learner ownership and self-assessment, emphasized by portfolios. Therefore, they may feel confused when told to set their own goals and self-assess achievement and progress.

Brown and Hudson (1998) addressed some disadvantages of using portfolio assessments: the issues of design decisions, logistics, interpretation, reliability, and validity:

Design decision issues include deciding (a) who will determine grading criteria, (b) how grading criteria will be established, (c) who will determine what the portfolio will contain, and (d) how much of

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daily authentic classroom activities will be included in the portfolios. Logistical issues involve finding (a) the increased time and resources needed to support portfolio assessments, (b) ways to rely on the training and abilities of teachers to implement portfolio assessments, and (c) the time for teachers to read and rate portfolios on a regular basis throughout the school year while simultaneously helping students develop those portfolios. Interpretation issues include (a) grading students' achievements as represented in their portfolios, (b) setting standards and interpreting the portfolios in a way that is equally fair to all students, (c) training teachers to make fair interpretations, and (d) reporting portfolio assessment results so that all interested audiences (e.g., students, parents, administrators, politicians) can understand them. Reliability issues involve (a) ensuring sufficient reliability across raters and occasions when ratings occur, (b) encouraging objectivity, (c) preventing mechanical errors, especially those that could affect decisions, (d) standardizing the rating and grading processes, and (e) ensuring equal access to resources for all students. Validity issues include (a) demonstrating the validity of the portfolios for the purposes of making decisions about students, (b) determining how adequately the portfolios exemplify students' work, development and abilities, (c) identifying and controlling any potential intervening variables that might affect students' achievements, and (d) separating out which student abilities lead to which performance characteristics in what amounts. (p.665)

There are potential barriers in the implementation of portfolios that prevent teachers from adopting portfolio assessment in their classrooms (Wolfe & Miller, 1997). Aschbacher (1992; cited in Wolfe & Miller, 1997) suggested that:

The most fundamental barrier was the tendency of teachers to emphasize instructional activities rather than student outcomes. Rather than focusing on the most desirable student behaviors, teachers rely on the battery of classroom activities they had compiled over their years of teaching to generate their assessments. The second barrier was the difficulty teachers had specifying criteria for judging student work. Third, a general discomfort with assessing others and being assessed (i.e., assessment anxiety) seemed to cause teachers to avoid incorporating portfolio assessments in their classrooms. The fourth barrier is lack of time for developing, implementing, and scoring these

assessments. The fifth and sixth barriers – lack of training and support and lack of a long-range implementation plan -- indicated the yearning of teachers in the project for additional assistance and guidance from others familiar with using these new forms of assessments. Finally, the seventh barrier was a general reluctance to change. (p. 237-238)

Wolfe and Miller (1997, p. 239-240) listed some barriers to portfolio implementation.

1. Extent to which portfolio use will require changes in the present curriculum.
2. Extent to which portfolio use will require changes in the instruction.
3. Resistance from students to creating portfolios.
4. Lack of personal motivation or interest in using portfolios.
5. Lack of perceived benefits gained from the time and effort spent using portfolios.
6. Lack of training on portfolio assessment.
7. Lack of facilities for storing portfolios.
8. Difficulty of creating scoring rubrics for portfolios.
9. Difficulty of scoring portfolios.
10. Amount of teacher time required for planning to use portfolio assessments.
11. Amount of class time required for implementing portfolio assessments

## 6- Conclusion

Portfolio assessment can be very valuable in teaching. It can offer insights into students' needs and expectations. Despite the demonstrated usefulness of portfolio assessment, several problems surrounding portfolio assessment were reported. Therefore, in using portfolios, the shortcomings must be considered so that the quality of the education program can be increased.

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سرسراو

## بررسی مستمر پورتفولیو: فواید و معایب

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مفهوم پورتفولیو از رشته هنرهای زیبا گرفته شده است. پورتفولیو نشان دهنده نمونه‌های کاری هنرمند است. بررسی مستمر، جمع‌آوری منظم کار دانش‌آموزان است که بر اساس معیار از پیش تعیین شده سنجیده می‌شود. این معیارها اغلب بشکل نمره، توضیحات (rubrics)، فهرست بازبینی (checklist) و یا مقیاس‌های درجه‌دار (rating scales) می‌باشد. پورتفولیو مجموعه‌ای از نمونه کارهای دانش‌آموزان است که در طول زمان با توجه به معیار خاص ساخته می‌شود و توسعه می‌یابد و نشان‌دهنده تلاش و پیشرفت دانش‌آموزان است.

تحقیقات نشان داده است که بررسی مستمر نسبت به آزمونهای سنتی دارای فواید بیشتری است. بعنوان مثال بررسی مستمر به دانش‌آموزان این امکان را می‌دهد که به پیشرفت تحصیلی خود فکر کنند و نقاط ضعف و قوت خود را بشناسند. بررسی مستمر علی‌رغم فواید زیاد معایبی نیز به همراه دارد. از جمله می‌توان به ناآشنایی مدرسان و صرف زمان زیاد در استفاده از آن اشاره کرد.

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