

Using a Portfolio as an Example of an Alternative Assessment

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Abstract. *Assessment is collecting and evaluating information about an individual's skills, knowledge, or performance to make decisions. It serves to find out about learning outcomes, identify strengths and weaknesses, and guide instruction. It is not unknown that assessment plays a crucial role in education, as it offers precious data about both individual and collective performance, leading to improvements. It also helps teachers customize instructions that meet the unique needs of their students. Furthermore, it aids in program evaluation and resource allocation. As assessment regards every stage of education, young learners should also be assessed, so that teaching them becomes more fruitful for everyone. As young learners demand special treatment, this article aims to discuss the ways of evaluating them properly.*

Key words: *assessment criteria, alternative ways, portfolio, young learners.*

Introduction

A good classroom assessment plan gathers students' learning evidence that informs the instructional decisions of teachers. It provides teachers with information about what students know and can do. To plan effective instruction, teachers also need to know what the student misunderstands and where the misconceptions lie.

Monitoring how well young learners are progressing and giving them constructive feedback on their learning and progress helps to motivate them. And it makes you feel confident about what you are teaching. But we don't have to stick to formal tests – there are many ways to assess how well learners are progressing that support the work you do in the classroom. Traditionally, assessment is imagined to be the form of tests or quizzes with multiple-choice items, matching, filling-in-the-blank, and true-false questions, sometimes in standardized tests that evaluate whether students have met specific objectives and outcomes, and other times created by the teacher. (Assessing young language learners”, Penny McKay, Cambridge University Press)

In addition to these traditional forms of assessment, several “alternative” or performance assessments require the learner to apply the knowledge, skills, and strategies used in learning.

Pierce and O'Malley (1992) define alternative assessment as “any method of finding out what a student knows or can do that is intended to show growth and inform instruction and is not a standardized or traditional test”.¹

Traditionally, assessment has taken the form of tests or quizzes with multiple-choice items, matching, filling-in-the-blank, and true-false questions, sometimes in standardized tests that

¹ <http://uk.ujs.sk/dl/3778/Puskas.pdf>

measure whether students have met specific objectives or outcomes, and other times created by the teacher.

In addition to these traditional forms of assessment, several “alternative” or performance assessments require the learner to apply the knowledge, skills, and strategies used in learning. Alternative or performance-based assessment (also known as assessment for learning) uses activities that reveal what students can do with the language, emphasizing their strengths rather than weaknesses in using English for meaningful purposes. These performance assessments are classroom-based, involving tasks in which language is used in authentic ways or through simulations of real-life language use.

Portfolios can be structured based on developmental categories, content areas, or specific topics and themes. They serve three primary purposes. Firstly, they are utilized for assessment and evaluation, tracking progress, achievements, developmental strengths, and areas requiring further attention. Secondly, portfolios facilitate self-assessment and reflection, enabling students to monitor their advancement and take responsibility for their learning journey. Lastly, portfolios serve as a means to communicate progress, allowing parents to witness their child's development and accomplishments.

The selection of portfolio type hinges on its intended purpose and usage. A working portfolio is employed to gather samples of student work for future assessment. Samples are collected by both students and teachers without final decisions on inclusion. These items may later contribute to other portfolio types. An evaluative portfolio involves the teacher utilizing materials for both formative and summative evaluations of progress, showcasing mastery of skills in a particular area. It doesn't encompass all work but presents a definitive collection. A showcase portfolio highlights a child's best work, chosen by the child, often shared with parents to showcase achievements. Lastly, an archival portfolio documents a student's progress over time, serving as a historical record of work spanning different classes. It facilitates communication between teachers and allows students to reflect on their growth.

Materials and methods

Portfolio evaluation stands as a potent method for measuring student progress in science classrooms, yet its efficacy hinges on meticulous implementation. To achieve this, educators must premeditate and establish explicit objectives and standards. Crafting a comprehensive plan is pivotal for seamless portfolio evaluation. This blueprint should delineate assessment criteria, project timelines, and portfolio components. With a structured plan in place, instructors can streamline the assessment process for optimal outcomes.

Moreover, delineating precise goals and expectations is imperative. This entails defining quality standards, deadlines, and any pertinent requirements. By establishing these parameters in advance, students are incentivized to approach the assessment earnestly, investing their utmost effort in constructing a proficient portfolio. By adhering to these methodologies, educators can ensure the success of their portfolio evaluations.

By proactively devising a plan and establishing transparent objectives, educators can guarantee the efficacy of portfolio assessments, facilitating an accurate appraisal of student learning.

Research on the benefits of portfolio assessment has been conducted by a variety of scholars and researchers in the fields of education, psychology, and assessment. These studies have been carried out by academics and experts affiliated with universities, research institutions, and educational organizations around the world.

Some prominent researchers who have contributed a lot to this topic include:

1. *Dr. Helen Barrett: A leading authority on electronic portfolios and portfolio assessment, Dr. Barrett has conducted extensive research on the use of portfolios in education, particularly in the context of digital technology and online learning environments.*

2. *Dr. Paul Black and Dr. Dylan Wiliam: These researchers have contributed significantly to the field of assessment for learning. While their work encompasses a broader range of assessment methods, they have explored the benefits of formative assessment approaches, which can include elements of portfolio assessment.*

3. *Dr. Lorna Earl: A renowned expert in educational assessment, Dr. Earl has conducted research on various aspects of assessment, including portfolio assessment and its impact on student learning and teacher practice.*

4. *Dr. Kathleen Blake Yancey: A scholar in rhetoric and composition studies, Dr. Yancey has researched the use of portfolios in writing instruction and assessment, examining how portfolios can support writing development and assessment practices.*

These researchers, among others, have contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding portfolio assessment and its benefits in education. Their studies have provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of portfolio assessment practices and have informed educators' understanding of how portfolios can be used to support student learning and assessment.

Research conducted on the benefits of portfolio assessment has yielded valuable insights into its effectiveness in various educational contexts. Numerous studies have explored the advantages of incorporating portfolio assessment into the learning process across different subjects and grade levels.

One key benefit identified in the research is the enhancement of student engagement and motivation. Portfolio assessment often involves students in the selection and reflection of their work, promoting a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning. This active involvement can lead to increased student motivation and a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, portfolio assessment has been shown to foster the development of critical thinking and metacognitive skills. Through the process of selecting, organizing, and reflecting on their work, students are encouraged to think critically about their learning progress and identify areas for improvement. This metacognitive awareness can lead to more effective learning strategies and improved academic performance.

Furthermore, research suggests that portfolio assessment can provide a more comprehensive and authentic measure of student learning compared to traditional forms of assessment, such as standardized tests. Portfolios allow students to showcase their skills, knowledge, and achievements in a variety of formats, including written work, projects, and multimedia presentations. This holistic approach to assessment provides a more accurate representation of students' abilities and allows for individualized feedback and support.

Overall, research findings highlight the numerous benefits of portfolio assessment in promoting student engagement, critical thinking, and authentic learning experiences. By incorporating portfolio assessment into their teaching practices, educators can create a more dynamic and effective learning environment that supports the diverse needs and abilities of all students.

Studies done lately have shown that portfolios might assess student success better and more precisely compared to other standardized forms (Valencia,1990). Besides, as Calfee and Perfumo (1993) suggest, they increase motivation and interest in learning, create lifelong learners, and are compatible with other basic elements like cooperative learning and professionalization of learning.

This study aims to find the research in the literature that focuses on the “theory of constructivism, alternative assessment methods, portfolio and portfolio assessment” and to depict the positive results obtained towards the use of portfolio assessment, the challenges of portfolios, and portfolio assessment, and implications for teachers in the end.

Sources of Evidence

Regarding the promises and challenges of portfolios, literature provides us with a lot of evidence. As to the benefits of portfolio assessment, many authors mentioned some of them as below;

- 1. Portfolios show student progress in time (Arter et al, 1995; Fenwick & Parsons, 1999),*
- 2. Portfolios combine instruction and assessment within a continuous process (Moya & O’Malley, 1994; Paulson et al, 1991),*
- 3. They are authentic assessments of student work (Calfee & Perfume, 1993; Valencia, 1990; Valencia & Calfee, 1991),*
- 4. They encourage students to self-reflect and self-evaluate (Glazer, 1991; Valencia, 1990), hence which leads to the improvement of metacognitive skills (Hamilton, 1994),*
- 5. Portfolios encourage student participation and increase student self-reliance (Fenwick & Parsons, 1999; Paulson et al, 1991),*
- 6. Portfolios inform teachers about the strengths and weaknesses of their students better than traditional assessments (Chen, 1993),*
- 7. Students’ and teachers’ attitudes grow positively (Ryan & Kuhs, 1993),*
- 8. They help multiple recordings of student progress (Chen, 1993; Mills, 1994),*
- 9. They also positively improve teachers’ attitudes toward their jobs (Perkins & Gelfer, 1993).*

Drawbacks or challenges of using portfolios are also mentioned by many authors as below;

- 1. Portfolio processes take a lot of time (Ediger, 2000; Fenwick & Parsons, 1999) and cost much (Ediger, 2000; Gomez, 2000).*
- 2. Compared to standardized tests, more studies should be done on the reliability and validity issues of portfolios (Ediger, 2000).*
- 3. The criteria used in the assessment of portfolios may vary, because different items included may require separate assessment criteria, that could be considered as a difficulty of portfolios (Ediger, 2000).*
- 4. Students need to be trained beforehand and guided continuously during the portfolio process (Fenwick & Parsons, 1999). Because they may not be or feel ready to undertake their learning or prepare something different like a portfolio. They may not know what to do or they may be frightened of the long process itself.*
- 5. Arter and Spandel (1992) highlight some challenges of portfolios including items in portfolios that may not represent one’s learning, the weakness of assessment criteria, and the possibility of subjectivity of assessment results.*

Upon its reception as an effective teaching and assessment method, many studies were done on portfolios. The following items were found when those research results were analyzed:

- 1. Considering the effects of portfolios on the achievement of various student skills, in most studies (Slater, Ryan, Samson, 1997; Starck, 1999; Subrick, 2003) no meaningful influence was found; whereas a significant difference was obtained about portfolios influence on especially writing skills of students (Starck, 1999; Spencer, 1999; Barootchi and Keshavarz, 2002; Enoki, 1992; Shober, 1996; Yurdabakan & Erdogan, 2009).*
- 2. In most studies, the use of portfolios led to positive attitudes towards reading and language arts (Calfee & Perfume, 1993; Valencia & Place, 1994), writing (Spencer, 1999), learning itself (Zou, 2002; Tiwari, 2003).*

3. *It is shown to better assess student progress, strengths, and weaknesses (Bushman & Schnitker, 1995; Starck, 1996; Gussie & Wright, 1999).*
4. *Instructors and students need instruction or warm-up training on the use of portfolios (Bushman & Schnitker, 1995; Starck, 1996; Gussie & Wright, 1999; Oğuz, 2003).*
5. *They motivate students, encourage critical thinking and problem-solving, increase learner responsibility, decrease anxiety, and lead to higher student participation (Shorb, 1995; Bujan, 1995; Slater et al, 1997; Zou, 2002; Barootchi and Keshavarz, 2002; Alabdelwahab, 2002).*
6. *On the other hand, organization and scoring of portfolios may be problematic (Gussie & Wright, 1999; Starck, 1996) and requires more time and effort on the part of teachers (Oğuz, 2003; Yurdabakan & Erdogan, 2009).*

Conclusion

Based on the information above, portfolio assessment emerges as a multifaceted tool with transformative potential in educational settings. Through our exploration of its benefits, including enhanced student engagement, the development of critical thinking skills, and the provision of authentic learning experiences, it becomes evident that portfolio assessment offers a holistic approach to understanding and evaluating student learning. As educators, we must recognize the value of incorporating portfolio assessment into our teaching practices, leveraging its capacity to empower students as active participants in their learning journey. By embracing portfolio assessment, we enrich the assessment landscape and cultivate a culture of reflection, growth, and meaningful learning outcomes. As we move forward, let us continue to explore, innovate, and harness the power of portfolio assessment to nurture every learner's diverse talents and potential."

Reference

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