

PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

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Prezentul articol pune în discuție o nouă metodă de învățare și evaluare a rezultatelor școlare, și anume, - Portofoliul.

Articolul prezintă avantajele utilizării portofoliului ca modalitate de evaluare alternativă și oferă sugestii de conținut al portofoliului elevului/studentului la disciplina limba engleză. Portofoliul constituie nu doar o nouă metodă de evaluare cu un ridicat potențial de dezvoltare a capacităților cognitive, dar și ilustrează evoluția și dezvoltarea elevului, reflectă performanța efectivă, modificări în sfera de interese, schimbări de atitudine cu plus valoare. Prin utilizarea acestei metode alternative de evaluare, elevul devine parte integrantă a sistemului de învățare și evaluare și își poate urmări gradual calitățile, defectele, plusurile și minusurile pe care le are, iar profesorul poate să-i urmărească progresul – în plan cognitiv, atitudinal și comportamental.

Cuvinte-cheie: metodă de evaluare, portofoliu, performanțe, colaborare elev-profesor.

In any educational system, assessment plays a significant role in improving learning, that is why, there has been a continuous increasing interest on assessment, new alternative types and techniques of assessment, and especially new online platforms that can be used for this. Furthermore, new developments in foreign language teaching as well as European policies on language learning require new competencies of teachers (e.g. the European Language Portfolio, self- and peer-assessment, etc).

As everybody knows, assessment performance is a day-to-day activity. It can be authentic and engaging demonstrations of students' abilities. It is based on a collection of information about what students know and what they are able to do. In assessment, there are multiple ways and methods of collecting information at different times and contexts. There are two tools of assessment: traditional and alternative assessments. First, traditional assessment tools that are widely used by teachers and which involve multiple-choice tests, true/false tests, short answers, and essays writing. Second, alternative assessment tools that involve three main tools: cognitive assessment, performance assessment, and portfolio assessment.

During the last two decades, the significance of alternatives in assessment as a counterweight to traditional testing has increased in many educational contexts and this can be explained by the fact that this new type of assessment puts a focus on holistic and learner-oriented assessment, taking into account more factors than a test in collecting evidence on learner's progress and performance.

Portfolio assessment is an alternative method of assessment which was introduced to cope with the changes and developments that occurred in the educational system and to answer the drawbacks of the traditional methods of assessments. It considers the student a full partner in the process of assessment rather than a subject of assessment. More specifically, portfolio assessment can be defined as an "ongoing process involving the student and teacher in selecting samples of students' work, during a specific period of time and according to predetermined criteria to show how much the writing, for example, has progressed and how much the students have put effort into it. It is also defined as the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio"[1].

A portfolio in the foreign language classroom is a collection of a learner's work that displays the progress that learner is making in connection with classroom goals. This assessment method is very learner-centered. A portfolio can contain student work samples, optimally chosen by both, the teacher and the learner, that are based on the learning goals. These can be, for example, samples of the learner's writing, a reading journal, and audio and/or video recordings. Brown H. stated that to show their progress in language learning, students can include these materials in their Portfolio:

- Essay and composition in draft and final form.
- Report, project outlines.
- Poetry and creative prose.
- Artwork, photos, newspaper or magazine clippings.
- Audio and/ or video recordings of presentation, demonstration, etc.
- Journal, diaries, and other personal reflections.
- Test, test score, and written homework exercise.
- Notes on lectures.
- Self and peer – assessment, comment, evaluation, and checklists [2].

Another problem that may arise is how to introduce Portfolio Assessment in the EFL classroom. When introducing portfolio assessment in the EFL classroom, the purposes of the portfolio need to be clearly communicated in advance, and both teachers and learners must consider it a valuable assessment tool in order for it to be effective. The reflection, (self-)

assessment, and documenting functions are usually considered to be the most important functions of the portfolio, but there are also others.

Ownership of the portfolio can increase learner motivation. It complements teacher assessment and learner assessment and promotes interaction between learners and the teacher. It can also function as a communication tool with parents as important stakeholders.

Apart from being learner-centered and allowing ownership of learning, portfolios offer opportunities for self-assessment and therefore critical thinking processes and for collaboration processes with peers, for example, when learners work together on one task for the portfolio. Portfolio assessment allows for a more holistic approach to language assessment because it can include multiple dimensions of learning that discrete-point testing cannot encompass. It also means more interaction and cooperation between the student and the teacher. More or less, portfolio can be a set of the activities taken on over time in the development of some products.

According to M. Jones and M. Shelton these are the following steps for successful portfolio development:

- State objectives clearly: Select one main function of your portfolio in class and connect it to your curriculum. Make the portfolio a compulsory and integral part of the curriculum so that it is taken seriously.
- Give guidelines on the materials to include: Give clear selection criteria of materials for the portfolio. Model tasks that are suitable for collection in the portfolio; if possible, show the portfolio of a previous learner as an example of good practice. Be clear about how much choice learners have concerning materials they can select for their portfolios.
- Communicate assessment criteria to students: Portfolio assessment incorporates teacher and self-assessment, and the criteria should be the same. These criteria must be communicated (or jointly developed) in advance. Learners can be asked to reflect on and assess their performance, for example, by retelling a story. The teacher and the student discuss the learner's performance during a conference, and the teacher gives his or her view and feedback. Together, they plan future learning objectives
- Designate time within the curriculum for portfolio development: Allow in-class time for learners to work on the portfolio and for teacher-learner conferences to value this type of formative assessment.
- Establish periodic schedules for review and conferencing: Reserve time for portfolio work regularly in order to avoid last-minute rushed collections that undermine the idea of process-orientation.

- Designate an accessible place to keep portfolios: Make an accessible space in the classroom or elsewhere for the learners to keep their portfolios for practical reasons. It is inconvenient for learners to carry huge and bulky material collections [3].

When speaking about types of portfolios, C.Danielson and A.Lesly distinguish 3 types of portfolios that can be used in classroom:

1. **Working Portfolio** which is containing students' work in progress as well as finished samples of students' work. The major purpose of a working portfolio is to be a saving bank for student work. In addition, the working portfolio may be used to diagnose student needs. The working portfolio is reviewed as a whole and by its pieces. It will be evaluated—either periodically or at the end of the learning unit. Students must reflect seriously on their work and what it demonstrates about them as learners. As students and their teachers look through the portfolio, they set short-term objectives for achieving certain curriculum goals. The portfolio thus provides evidence of strengths and weaknesses and serves to define the next steps in learning.

2. **Display, Showcase, or Best Works Portfolios.** It is used to demonstrate the highest level of achievement attained by the student. Collecting items for this portfolio is a student's way of saying “Here's who I am. Here is what I can do.” There are many possibilities for the contents of a display portfolio. Students should choose types of items put in their portfolio of best works—a drawing they like, a poem they have written, a list of books they have read, or a difficult problem they have solved. Their choices define them as students and as learners. In making their selections, students illustrate what they believe to be important about their learning, what they value and want to show to others.

3. **Assessment Portfolio.** Primary function of an assessment portfolio is to document what a student has learned. The primary purpose of an assessment portfolio is to document student learning on specific curriculum outcomes. The items in the portfolio should be designed to elicit the knowledge and skill specified in the outcomes. Assessment portfolios may be used to demonstrate mastery in any curricular area. They may span any period of time, from one unit to the entire year and they may be dedicated to one subject or many subjects [4].

Another classification of portfolios proposed by many scholars is: *process oriented* or *product oriented portfolios*.

1. **Process oriented portfolios**

Process oriented portfolios tell a story about the growth of a learner. They document the processes of learning and creating, including earlier drafts, reflections on the process, and obstacles encountered along the way. They may be organized into skill areas or themes, yet each contains a

student's work from the beginning, middle, and end of a learning unit. For example, there may be three drafts of a short story: a preliminary draft, a reworked draft reflecting teacher and peer feedback, and a final draft. The student can comment on the ways one is better than the other. In this manner, the artifacts can be compared providing evidence about how the student's skills have improved. In any number of ways, in writing or perhaps during a parent-teacher conference, the student would reflect on the learning process: identifying how skills have changed, celebrating accomplishments, and establishing present and future challenges.

2. Product oriented portfolios

Product oriented portfolios are collections of work a student considers his or her best. The aim is to document and reflect on the quality and range of accomplishments rather than the process that produced them. It generally requires a student to collect all of her work until the end, at which time she must choose artifacts that represent work of the highest quality.

There are any number of ways to facilitate this process. Students can be left completely to their own devices to choose. A teacher can also establish parameters of what a portfolio must contain and the quality an artifact must achieve to be included. For example, a math teacher may stipulate that a portfolio must contain evidence of the ability to successfully apply the concepts of mean, median, and mode. The teacher may also stipulate that these artifacts must have earned a certain score to be accepted into the portfolio. In this way, product oriented portfolios can be quite effective in holding students accountable for producing quality work. Finally, it is very common for each artifact in a product oriented portfolio to be accompanied by self-reflection, usually in writing, on why and in what ways the artifacts represent best work.

It is important to mention that both kinds of portfolios are used at all grade levels. It does turn out, however, that process-folios are more common at the elementary level. It may be that teachers at these levels tend to be more concerned about individual growth than about determining specific levels of performance. The process-folio may also match elementary teaching methods more readily.

Similarly, product oriented portfolios are more common at the secondary level. This is probably due to two factors. First, the higher stakes of grade point averages and test scores at these levels has created a more final result oriented learning environment. Second, older students generally have the higher thinking skills necessary to choose their best work wisely, as well as engage in self-reflection more deeply. Notwithstanding any of these points, neither type of portfolio is necessarily better suited for any grade level. It is usually a matter of preference, teaching style, or school culture.

In choosing the type of assessment portfolio, the teacher must take into consideration and point out the purpose of the portfolio. The purpose of the portfolio will determine the process in which it is made and kinds of item included in it. Determined purpose of portfolio will avoid overload and over generalize one. The purpose can be defined based on the users' needs. The objective of using portfolio is to assess the progress of the student on certain period of time, to show the efficiency of the teaching, to establish communication with the parents of the students, to assess the program, etc. In short, it is so important to choose the purpose since it will affect the way to collect the items, and the quality of the items.

The second is point out the items to be included in portfolio. Regarding the purpose of the portfolio, it can be taken as the basis to point out the items that should be collected, the person to collect them, the interval for each collection, and how to assess them. It is important to establish continuous communication with the students to build their responsibilities. Each item should also be tagged with certain information such as its description and the reason why it is chosen as the evidence. The tag will make students aware of their learning progress as they share what they can prove they know. There is no restriction on the content or items included in a portfolio. For example, a portfolio organized by a student can contain a lot of visual or activity materials such as individual or group studies, his/her best studies, tests, projects, presentations, control lists, problem solutions, questionnaire, teacher comment, reading list and reviews, self-assessment/peer-assessment checklist, interview notes, course note, cd and disks.

The third is determining the assessment criteria. It is very important to determine the criteria for assessing the portfolio. Because an assessment criterion allows students to recognize, and select work that is considered high quality. It also allows and encourages discussions among teachers, students, and other concerning the outcomes and quality of outcomes. Assessment criteria which have been used to determine the quality of the student's performance should be clear and easy to understand. This is quite important in terms of student to assess his own works and to be able to fulfill his weaknesses. Rubrics should be used in order to determine quality of the evidence in portfolio and to make a reliable and valid assessment.

In other words, in portfolio preparation there are necessary steps to do; students' ideas is strongly considered, the purpose should be clear, assessment should explained clearly, the process could be finished on a certain time period, portfolio should enhance students learning attitude, and items in the portfolio should be multi-dimensional and address different

learning fields. It is very important to design a portfolio which can present students' performance and development in any time period in detail.

The next step in building a Student Portfolio is to decide and choose: **Paper or Digital Portfolio.** A digital portfolio is a collection of artifacts of learning that demonstrates growth, acquisition of skills or knowledge, and student creativity over time. Some of the most used formats for student portfolios are blogs, online journals, digital archives, websites and notebooks.

Once you're ready to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on and share their work with an authentic audience, there are several tools you can use:

- For sharing inside the classroom: Students can use **Google Slides** to create a digital portfolio that showcases their progress on a project, posting their work as well as their reflections on the work. You can have them start from scratch or create a template for them to use. You can have students share this portfolio with you alone or embed it in a blog post or post it to a Google Drive folder shared with the class. You could instead use **Google Classroom** to create the portfolios: A student can add documents to their portfolio that can be viewed by both you and the student over the course of the year.

- For sharing with the outside world: Students can post their **Google Slides** to a public-facing class blog or use a tool like **Flipgrid** to post video journal entries about their learning. These videos can be summative, or they can act like checkpoints as students work through the project. Flipgrid is free, and the company provides a sample consent letter to send home. Videos can be shared publicly, with only the class, or with only the teacher.

Another tool, **Book Creator**, allows students to create digital portfolios that can include text, images, audio recordings, and videos. The books are contained in a class library, and students can browse each other's books. Students can review their books to reflect on their growth in critical skills, and their books and the class library can be shared publicly. BookCreator can be used for free, but if you want to create more than 40 books you'll need to pay for access.

- The tool **Seesaw** allows teachers to create activities that students can work on and share to a class portfolio. These activities can be designed by the teacher, or they can be imported from an activity library curated by Seesaw. An activity might ask students to explain their reasoning while solving a math problem, reading and reflecting on an article, or reflecting on their progress on a recent project. Seesaw allows teachers to provide family access to student portfolios so parents have a window into what students are learning.

You can watch with your students or suggest them some videos that will help them to create and use e-portfolios, such as:

1. *Creating with New Google Sites and Student e-Portfolios*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAT_Da1oSSE

2. *NEW Google Sites EASY Student Portfolio*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IjuM2VoLgU>

3. *Creating Journals and Digital Portfolios in Book Creator*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K73lhAqh718>

4. *How to Make Digital Portfolios with Seesaw*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O81_3WzxQbE

5. *Sway Digital Portfolio*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6dqjKccryM>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vOlxw_w3-c

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the student learning achievement with portfolio assessment has lots of advantages because they provide a way of documenting and evaluating growth in a much more nuanced way than selected response tests can. At the same time, teachers may follow students' active involvement in learning and evaluation. Students assume their learning process, they become aware of the objectives they must achieve and self-correct their learning.

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