

SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN EFL

Tolga ERDOGAN,
Hacettepe University,
Ankara, TURKEY

Assist. Prof. Dr. Irfan YURDABAKAN,
Dokuz Eylul University,
Izmir, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Portfolio assessment has gained importance in the last twenty years and has been in use at different areas in education. Foreign language teaching is one of them. This study aims to find out the opinions of students on portfolio assessment. The study was implemented in a secondary school English preparatory class. As part of the study, portfolios and portfolio assessment activities were integrated into the program in a treatment group. The analysis of student responses showed that portfolio assessment is a fair method, compared to traditional assessments it is a more down-to-earth approach, it increases student responsibility and motivates students positively. On the other hand, student responses revealed some negative results, like portfolio studies take time, there is a need to include various types of a lot of tasks in portfolios, and self-evaluations, reviews and corrections of student work entail a lot of student and teacher effort.

Keywords: Portfolio, portfolio assessment, foreign language teaching.

INTRODUCTION

The theory of constructivism provides a wide theoretical framework from design of learning settings to construction of assessment processes. Part of that, in today's transition from traditional to student-centered learning settings, there are also innovations in assessment procedures, where there is a shift to formative assessment. These innovations involve alternatives that require questioning the learning process and using learning and assessment activities together. Boud (1995) stresses that the assessment process shouldn't be thought only as an instrument to give students a diploma, but it should also be viewed as a process that leads up to student development and better learning conditions and applications. Such alternative views have given rise to new assessment approaches like portfolio assessment.

A student portfolio represents a presentation of a student's best work, which functions in much the same way as an artist's, a model's, or a photographer's portfolio would. Student portfolios may be used to examine a student's needs with regard to curriculum objectives and to demonstrate growth and learning over the semester or school year (Pierce & O'Malley. 1992). Many educators, writers and researchers discuss the merits of using portfolios as an assessment instrument. For example, Calfee and Perfumo (1993) stress that using portfolios for assessment is important to show the learners' competence, rather than only choosing the correct answers and especially portfolio assessment provides more information about the learners. Portfolios orient the students to produce various types of more authentic work and urge them to be more creative; also portfolio assessment gives the learners more freedom and contributes to development and improvement of their higher order thinking skills and meta-cognitive strategies. Portfolios provide teachers opportunities to perceive students not only as readers or writers, but also as individuals with special interests and needs, and provide students with unique opportunities to advance their learning as well. Portfolios encompass some

assets like dream power, reflection, variety and individualism, which cannot be found in standardized and norm-based assessments (Irwin-DeVitis, 1996).

Besides, Valencia (1990) suggests that, when compared to recent studies of habitual standardized and quantitative assessments, portfolio assessment provides important evidence towards correct and valid assessment of student achievement. Also, according to Calfee and Perfumo (1993) and Bedir, Polat and Sakacı (2009), portfolio assessment used in one lesson, improves students' interests, motivation and confidence towards learning, and eventually serves students to become lifelong learners.

Results of many studies have shown that portfolio assessment has positive influence on learning (Gomez, 2000; Morgil, Çingör, Erökten, Yavuz & Özyalçın, 2004), facilitates authentic assessment of learning (Calfee & Perfumo, 1993), helps finding weaknesses and strengths in student learning and strengthens student-teacher relationship (Birgin, 2008), encourages students to reflect and self-evaluate (Herbert & Schultz, 1996) and improves meta-cognitive skills (Hamilton, 1994). Also Enoki (1992), Korkmaz and Kaptan (2002), and Deveci, Ersoy and Ersoy (2006) stressed that portfolios are more accurate, down-to-earth, and objective than standardized tests in assessing students' developments. Parallel to the findings in those studies, this research aims to identify qualitatively the students' opinions on portfolio assessment, the application of which is still considered new in Turkey.

Foreign Language Teaching and Portfolio Assessment

Foreign language teaching is one of the areas where portfolio assessment is used effectively. Gussie and Wright (1999) emphasize a gradual increase in the use of portfolios to assess the students' writing skills in foreign language teaching in the last twenty years. Authors like Chen (1993), Fenwick and Parsons (1999), Singer (1993) and Wolf (1989) stated that portfolio assessment is effective in foreign language teaching.

Considering the studies done on portfolio assessment, the positive results that were found could be summarized as: positive reactions of both teachers and students toward portfolios; positive attitude development toward learning and more successful than traditional tests in assessing student attainments; improvement of students' writing skills and positive change in students' study habits; increase in students' taking responsibility of their own learning; improvement in students' higher order thinking skills, critical thinking skills, problem solving strategies, and self-evaluation abilities; and evidence towards portfolios role in improving communication among students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Additionally, some researchers have stated that the real effects of portfolio use could only be observed in subsequent years, because it may not have immediate effects on students' achievement and their attitudes. They also pointed out that portfolio assessment would take a lot of time and would cost much more than standardized assessment; and that the teacher and students should have training and adequate effort should be reserved for the activities.

The Purpose and Significance of the Study

The studies about the use of portfolio assessment in foreign language training largely give evidence on that they do improve students' language skills. By courtesy of this study, it might be possible to compare the opinions of students on portfolio assessment with other study results. Within this framework, we tried to find answer(s) to the following question: "What are the opinions of students regarding portfolio assessment?"

METHODOLOGY

Method and Participants

This experimental research was implemented on a treatment group (n=22), chosen among 14 classrooms in a state secondary school in Izmir, a province located in the west of Turkey. Although the data collection process

depends upon a 12-session experimental study, it could still be evaluated as a qualitative research method because we analyzed the responses of students to 10 open-ended questions about portfolio assessment (Kuş, 2003).

In English lessons of this particular high school (secondary school), the main aim was to improve reading, listening, speaking and writing skills of students. During the 12-week experimental study, portfolio assessment applications were integrated into the curriculum. One of the researchers himself was the teacher in the treatment group. At the end of the 12-week implementation, the students were asked to write answers to 10 open-ended questions about their opinions on portfolio assessment. This paper aims to share those findings obtained from the student answers.

In literature, there are various approaches about the design and application stages of portfolio assessment. Even though there are different approaches towards portfolio assessment applications in literature, the approach suggested by Barnhardt et al. (1998) was taken as a model in this study. According to that approach, the stages of the portfolio assessment process are shown in Figure 1.

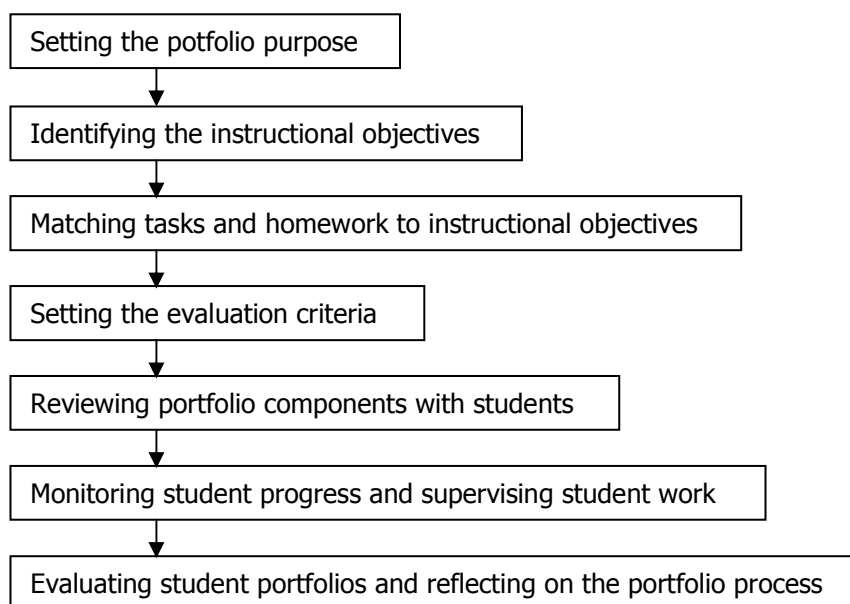


Figure 1: The Portfolio Assessment Process Model

For the purpose of the research, the lessons in each group were carried on as planned; 2 course hours (80 min.) were allocated to portfolio activities. Tasks and homework were assigned to students that matched the defined course objectives and topics in each unit. During the treatment; the problems of students, the general and individual explanations and reflections of both the teacher and the students, and controls of student homework were all done in those 2 hours allocated to portfolio applications. In the last two sessions of the 12-week treatment, each student presented his/her portfolio to class; hence they were given the chance to reflect on their efforts.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

In this study, 10 open-ended questions about students' opinions on portfolio assessment were formed by taking the goals of this study into account and by examining the studies of such writers like Anselmo (1998), Rolheiser, Bower and Stevahn (2000), and Liu (2003). The questions were reviewed by experts and found appropriate for the research purposes. The responses of students were analyzed by using content analysis,

where the themes were ordered from the ones with high frequency to the ones with low frequency (Kuş, 2003).

FINDINGS

In this study, we sought for the opinions of students regarding portfolio assessment. The written answers of the students were examined through content analysis. The findings for each question are given below.

Which part of your portfolio did you like most? Why?

When the answers of those 21 students in the treatment group were analyzed, it was found that 33% of them (n=7) liked the reflection part, introductory part and the writing tasks themselves most. 23% (n=5) stated that they liked the reading part most and they added that they enjoyed preparing the reading part of their portfolios, because they thought it was quite helpful to them. 19% (n=4) of the students liked the speaking part most, because it helped to discover their spoken mistakes and improve their pronunciations. Another 14% (n=3) stressed that portfolio tasks urged them to do research and those tasks helped them so evaluate themselves. Only 9% (n=2) of the students specified the listening part as their most favorable part.

Ali

The best two parts of this study were that we could choose the items we wanted and writing the introductory and final sections. It is a wonderful feeling to evaluate the products after some hard effort spent on them. That's why I liked the writing part most.

Did the portfolio application help you get better organized this semester?

16 students (76%) revealed that portfolios urged them to study more, find practical methods, and manage their times better to finish their work on time. 4 students (19%) wrote that they planned their studies beforehand and one student stated that he was able to find his strengths and weaknesses during activities.

How did you decide what to put in your portfolio?

14 students (67%) wrote that they chose the items with the highest grades and they picked the items that best represented their improvements in language skills. A few students based their decisions on the content of the items (19%) and the time they spent on them (14%).

What challenged you during the portfolio study?

29% (n=6) of the students stated that portfolio preparation required intensive study in a limited time; 24% (n=5) found the speaking tasks challenging; 19% (n=4) found the self-evaluation of portfolio products difficult; %14 (n=3) found the task reviewing and task re-editing hard; and the rest of treatment group, 14% (3) of the students said portfolio study was difficult, because it was a first time experience for them.

Ufuk

What challenged me most was finding myself studying much more and doing a research. Rewriting homework for the lack of diligence I had shown, because I had to write it in a short time was difficult for me. Repeating homework is not nice.

Did the portfolio study help you take more responsibility during the English learning process?

48% (n=10) of the students said that their responsibilities increased because they needed to work harder to show their best and they felt the need to work harder on topics, which they were poor at. 33% (n=7) of them put forth that striving to do the best motivated them and inspired them to learn more. Only 2 students (9.5%) stated that they noticed they were learning now.

Ali

With the help of this portfolio study, we became aware of the homework we did before for the sake of doing it and the meaningless results of the exams and this gave us more responsibility and urged us to give more attention to our homework and showed us the necessity of planning before doing.

If you were to change any item in your portfolio, which one would it be?

Majority of students (62%) stated that they wouldn't change any item in their portfolios, because what they included best represented their efforts. Just few students would change their speaking (24%), writing and listening items (14%), because they said they could do better.

Would you like to present your portfolio to somebody? Who would that be? Why?

Almost half of the students (52%) stated that they would like to show their portfolios to their families and the other half to their previous English teachers (48%), just to show their present foreign language levels.

How is portfolio assessment different from other traditional assessments (e.g. tests and exams)?

67% (n=14) of the students presented that portfolio assessment was a more realistic approach, because unlike the momentary tests, it was based on studies done in a whole semester. Seven students (33%) stressed that carelessness, excitement and fear could have an influence on test scores and they added that this was not true for portfolio assessment.

Ali

The difference between portfolio and traditional assessments is like the temperature difference between Russia and Saudi Arabia. Portfolio studies help me to show my real achievement, which the exams can't and boosts my self-confidence.

Do you think your grades will be fair now?

71.4% (n=15) of the students wrote that the assessment based on portfolios would be fair, and attributed this to their studies they did the whole semester and to their products with which they could present their best work. 14% (n=3) of the students asserted that (portfolio assessment) is flexible compared to traditional assessments and their studies would not be in vain whereas 2 students (9.5%) stated that injustice would be minimum.

Hakan

We got several grades because of our studies and efforts. They are our real improvements and achievements. Our grades will be fair for sure with this type of assessment.

Do you have any ideas or suggestions that will help us in the future?

48% (n=10) of the students suggested that much more time should be allocated to portfolio studies; 33.3% (n=7) said it would be appropriate to include wide range of more products into the portfolios and those products should be more about the skills that need improvement; three students (14%) implied the necessity

of teacher help and explanations when the portfolio objectives were determined, and related tasks and homework were assigned for each individual.

Anil

While preparing my portfolio, I spent the time I reserved for my exams. If good results are expected out of these portfolio studies, there shouldn't be any exams, or at least the portfolio study should cover the whole year, not only one semester.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to examine the students' views on portfolio assessment. For this purpose, the answers of students to 10 open-ended questions were analyzed. According to the analysis results, the opinions of students on portfolio assessment are: it is a fair method; it is a more realistic approach compared to traditional testing applications; it increases responsibility because of a need to do the best and to show improvement; it motivates and arouses learning desire; and the students liked the writing part most. The negative opinions, on the other hand, are: there is not enough time to do the best work; wider range of more products should be included in portfolios, students had difficulty in reading part of portfolio and in doing self-evaluation; it is difficult to review and correct the tasks and homework; and it is difficult, because it is a first time experience for the students. Finally, few students expressed that portfolio assessment would be a little unfair.

Many researchers (Alabdelwahab, 2002; Hall & Hewitt-Gervais, 1999; Spencer, 1999; Tiwari, 2003; Slater, Ryan & Samson, 1997; Liu, 2003; Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002; Calfee & Perfumo, 1993; Korkmaz & Kaptan, 2002; Morgil et al, 2004; Deveci et al, 2006; Birgin, 2008; Bekir et al, 2009) have stated that portfolio assessment increases motivation for learning; establishes feelings of confidence, self-respect, and responsibility towards learning; and it is a much fairer approach compared to traditional assessment applications. The positive results obtained in this study agree with the results of these researchers. On the other hand, Juniewicz (2003), Ediger (1999), Fenwick and Parsons (1999), Bushman and Schnitker (1995), and Caner (2010) expressed their concerns over the fact that portfolio assessment could lead to some difficulties because it is a new assessment type and more time is required to get the best out of it. Some of the results of this study that represent the difficulties in portfolio assessment in a way support this opinion.

As a result, this study examined the opinions of students on portfolio assessment. We hope the findings would be beneficial to practitioners of portfolio assessment in EFL settings.

IJONTE's Note: This article was presented at International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications, 27-29 April, 2011, Antalya-Turkey, and selected for publishing for the 3rd issue of IJONTE 2011 by IONTE Science Committee.

BIODATA AND CONTACT ADDRESSES OF AUTHORS



Tolga ERDOGAN is an English instructor and currently a PhD student in Educational Sciences at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. He graduated with honors from Bosphorus University English Language Teaching Department in Istanbul and received his Master's degree in Educational Sciences in Dokuz Eylul University in İzmir, Turkey. His main academic interests are program development and evaluation, constructivist teaching/learning, alternative assessment, lifelong learning, and English Language Teaching.

Tolga ERDOGAN
Nenehatun Cad. Plevne Apt.
No: 1B/18 Kucukesat
Ankara, Turkey
E. Mail: tolgasensei@gmail.com



Irfan YURDABAKAN is Assist. Prof. from the Educational Sciences Department of Buca Faculty of Education at Dokuz Eylul University, Izmir, Turkey. His major field of study is measurement and evaluation. Most of his studies focus on traditional and modern test development theories. However, he has been studying alternative assessment methods in education for the last nine years.

Assist. Prof. Dr. Irfan YURDABAKAN
Dokuz Eylul Universitesi
Buca Egitim Fakultesi
Egitim Bilimleri Bolumu
Buca, 35160 Izmir, Turkey
E. Mail: irfan.ybakan@deu.edu.tr

REFERENCES

- Alabdelwahab, S. Q. (2002). Portfolio assessment: A qualitative investigation of portfolio self-assessment practices in an Intermediate EFL Classroom, Saudi Arabia. (UMI No: 3081894)
- Anselmo, C. (1998). Experiences students encounter with portfolio assessment: A qualitative inquiry. (UMI No: 9836566)
- Barnhardt, S., Kevorkiani, J. & Delett, J. (1998). *Portfolio assessment in the foreign language classroom*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED448602).
- Barootchi, N. & Keshavarz, M. H. (2002). Assessment of achievement through portfolios and teacher-made tests. *Educational Research*, 44(3), 279-288.

- Bedir, A., Polat, M. & Sakacı, T. (2009). 7.sınıf fen ve teknoloji dersine ait bir uygulama çalışması: Portfolyo [Performance application of the 7th grade science and technology course: Portfolio]. C.B.Ü. Fen Bilimleri Dergisi, 5 (1), 45-58.
- Birgin, O. (2008). Alternatif bir değerlendirme yöntemi olarak portfolyo değerlendirme uygulamasına ilişkin öğrenci görüşleri [Students' views on portfolio application as an alternative assessment method]. *Türk Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 6(1), 1-24.
- Boud, D. (1995) *Enhancing learning through self assessment*. Kogan Page, London.
- Bushman, L. & Schnitker, B. (1995). *Teacher attitudes on portfolio assessment, implementation, and practicability*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED388661).
- Calfee, R. & Perfumo, P. (1993). Student portfolios: Opportunities for a revolution in assessment. *Journal of Reading*, 36(7), 532-537.
- Caner, M. (2010). Student views on using portfolio assessment in EFL writing courses. *Anadolu University Journal of Social Studies*, 10(1), 223-236.
- Chen, L. (1993). Portfolios in second and foreign language classroom assessment. Retrieved October 21, 2005 from <http://spectrum.troy.edu/~lchen/papers/portfolio.doc>.
- Coombe, C. & Barlow, L. (2004). The Reflective portfolio: Two case studies from the United Arab Emirates. *English Teaching Forum*, 42(1), 18-23.
- Deveci, H., Ersoy, A. F. & Ersoy, A. (2006). The views of prospective elementary school teachers on the use of portfolio assessment in teacher education. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, 6(1), 193-199.
- Ediger, M. (1999). *Purposes in learner assessment*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429991).
- Enoki, D. (1992). *Student portfolio and profiles: A holistic approach to multiple assessments in whole language classrooms*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED35343).
- Fenwick, T. J. & Parsons, J. (1999). *Using portfolios to assess learning*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED428398).
- Gomez, E. (2000). *Assessment portfolios: Including English language learners in large-scale assessments*. ERIC Digest based on article published by the Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University in "Perspectives on Policy and Practice" (March 1999). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED447725).
- Gussie, W. F. & Wright, R. (1999). *Assessment of the implementation of portfolio assessment in K-8 school districts in New Jersey*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Educational Research Association, Hilton Head, SC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED429996).
- Hall, B. W. & Hewitt-Gervais, C. M. (1999). *The application of student portfolios in primary/intermediate and self-contained/multi-age team classroom environments: Implications for instruction, learning, and assessment*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED432598).

Hamilton, L. S. (1994). *Validating hands-on science assessments through an investigation of response process*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED376202).

Irwin-DeVitis, L. (1996). Literacy portfolios: The myth and the reality. Literacy assessment for today's schools: Monograph of The College Reading Association, 135-144.

Juniewicz, K. (2003). Student portfolios with a purpose. *The Clearing House*, 77(2), 73-77.

Korkmaz, H. & Kaptan, F. (2002). Fen eğitiminde öğrencilerin gelişimini değerlendirmek için portfolyo kullanımı üzerine bir inceleme [An investigation on using portfolio for assessing students' development in science education]. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 23, 167-176.

Kuş, E. (2003). *Nitel-Nicel Araştırma Yöntemleri* [Qualitative-Quantitative Research Methods]. Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık.

Liu, Y. (2003). A case study of selected ESL students' experiences with writing portfolios in college composition classes. (UMI No: 3115767)

Morgil, İ., Çingör, N., Erökten, S., Yavuz, S. & Özyalçın Oskay, Ö. (2004). Bilgisayar destekli kimya eğitiminde portfolyo çalışmaları [Portfolio studies in computer assisted chemistry education]. *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology – TOJET*, 3(2), 105-118.

Moya, S. S. & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). A portfolio assessment model for ESL. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 13, 13-36.

Pierce, L. V. & O'Malley, J. M. (1992). *Performance and portfolio assessment for language minority students*. NCBE Program Information Guide Series, 9 Retrieved October 17, 2005 from <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu>.

Rolheiser, C., Bower, B. & Stevahn, L. (2000). *The portfolio organizer: Succeeding with portfolios in your classroom*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision, Retrieved January 15, 2005 from <http://site.ebrary.com>

Singer, S. (1993). *Portfolio assessment in foreign language, pilot project*. Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corp., Ind. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED368197).

Slater, T. F., Ryan, J. M. & Samson S. L. (1997). *The impact and dynamics of portfolio assessment and traditional assessment in a college physics course*. Retrieved January 18, 2005 from <http://solar.physics.montana.edu/tslater/publications/#jrst1>

Spencer, D. M. (1999). *An exploration of portfolio assessment and its influence on children's writing*. Unpublished master's thesis, Regina University – Canada.

Tiwari, A. (2003). From process to outcome: The effect of portfolio assessment on student learning. *Nurse Education Today*, 23(24), 269-277.

Valencia, S. (1990). A portfolio approach to classroom reading assessment: The whys, whats, and hows. *The Reading Teacher*, 43(4), 38-40.

Valencia, S & Place, N. (1994). Portfolios: A process for enhancing teaching and learning. *The Reading Teacher*, 47(8), 666-669.

Wolf, D. P. (1989). Portfolio assessment: Sampling student work. *Educational Leadership*, 46(7), 35-39.

Zollman, A. & Jones, D. L. (1994). *Accommodating assessment and learning: Utilizing portfolios in teachers education with pre-service teachers*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Research Council on Diagnostic and Prescriptive Mathematics, 21st, Fort Worth, TX. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED368551).