

# **A CASE STUDY ON ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHERS WHO ARE NOT USING PORTFOLIOS AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL**

## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate English teachers' perceptions of portfolio assessment and understand why they preferred or did not prefer to use portfolios as an assessment tool. The context of the study was a vocational school in the Aegean part of Turkey. The teachers were graduates of various English language programs such as English philology, American studies, and translation/interpretation. A case study design was adopted, and the perceptions of three English teachers with different backgrounds on portfolio assessment was investigated. The aim was to find out how they perceived portfolio assessment and their reasons for (not) using it. The instruments used for data collection were an open-ended questionnaire that inquired their background on teaching, perception and use of portfolio and thoughts on the use of e-portfolio assessment with follow-up questions for each part that inquired their reasons for thinking or doing so. In addition, 10-minute interviews followed the questionnaire to backchannel the information they had provided and allow them to elaborate on their thoughts, which would help collect rich data for a precise analysis. The data were analysed thoroughly, and emerging themes were categorized. The results showed that teachers had similarities and differences in their perception of portfolio assessment. Overall, the perceptions of the participant teachers were positive, with few concerns regarding the content, use and assessment. The results were discussed and ideas for further research on portfolio assessment were suggested.

**Key words:** Alternatives in assessment, Case Study, English teachers' perceptions, Portfolio assessment, language learning, language assessment

## **INTRODUCTION**

In all contexts of teaching, from pre-school to post-graduate studies, assessment is an important part of teaching practices (Derakhshan, Rezaei and Alemi, 2011). It enhances the quality of education (Abduh, 2021). Assessing the learning process can help teachers observe how students manage the learning process, what they need and what motivates them, which can help teachers understand the kind of support they need to give students throughout this process (Andhini & Setiawati-Halimi, 2021).

In order to know how much is received or what areas are troublesome, teachers have to assess their students in various ways. In teaching contexts, assessment is usually done using transmission models such as oral or written tests (Altan, 2016). Clarke and Boud (2016) state that summative assessments fall short on acknowledging student work in any way but grades, which does not suffice to

spot and explain the reasons for gaps in understanding or how to better those missing parts. Therefore, it has been suggested that there must be a change towards alternative assessment methods which are more authentic and constructivist; methods that regard learners' individuality (Altan, 2016; Kan, 2007). In their summary of the positive characteristics of alternative assessment, Brown and Hudson (1998) remark that alternative assessments value student performance, use meaningful, everyday activities and tasks that provide opportunities for the use of metacognitive skills, focus on both process and product, help learners see their strengths and weaknesses, and be clear about the assessment criteria. These positive characteristics are supported by others. Diaz-Maggioli (2003) states that learning is an ongoing process where individuality should be embraced. Cheng & Fox (2017) say that the more students are directly involved in the assessment process, the more aware they will become of their learning and take responsibility for it. Lam (2014) states that learner autonomy and being able to monitor one's learning process are of great importance in educational contexts.

As a consequence of the positive characteristics of alternative assessment, a search for alternative assessment tools that value the process of learner development, learner autonomy and self-regulated learning has increased (Lynch and Shaw, 2005; Cheng & Fox, 2017). This shift in interest towards alternative assessments has increased interest in portfolios in L2 contexts (Antón & Pendexter, 2021; Lynch and Shaw, 2005; Lam, 2014; Cheng & Fox, 2017).

Portfolios have been used in educational contexts as a tool for assessment (Soruc, 2011; Karakaya, 2015; Hamidi & Khatib, 2017; Avan & Şahin, 2020). The purpose of using portfolios is to track student development and achievement in certain areas (Hamidi & Khatib, 2017). It deals with learning on a wide range, such as learning skills and abilities (Hamidi & Khatib, 2017).

Portfolios measure progress and achievement, and provide motivation (Abduh, 2021). It is an alternative assessment method that is implemented systematically using a set of pre-determined criteria (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007). Learners construct and document their personal experiences, which can represent their conceptualisation of matters, their progress over time (Hamp-Lyons, 1991; Neimeyer, 1993), the work and effort put into it and the students themselves (Yancey, 2004).

Fenwick & Parsons (1999) state that portfolio holds both benefits and challenges which manifest themselves for both teachers and students. It is challenging in that it requires time and effort on both teachers' and students' part. The researchers state that careful planning of the guidelines and criteria for portfolios is necessary (p. 2). Despite its possible challenges, many researchers state that it is a beneficial tool in professional development, promoting learner autonomy and building self-confidence (Fenwick and Parsons, 1999; Meyer & Tusin, 1999; Hashemian and Fadaei, 2013; Çardak & Böcük, 2015), and help them become autonomous thinkers, decision-makers, and problem-solvers (Caner, 2010; Lam, 2014).

Portfolio studies have been shown to support learner development in different contexts ranging from EFL learners' perception of portfolios (Soruc, 2011) to prospective teachers' meta-cognitive development through portfolio assessment (Evin-Gencel, 2017). They are frequently used in the context of language learning and teacher training. The purpose of using portfolios for teacher training is to extend the individual knowledge and experience of teaching to as many teachers/ teacher candidates as possible to create a net of teachers who are collaborating and learning from one another with the concern for implementing better teaching practices (Newby, Allan, Fenner, Jones,, Komorowska, & Soghikyan, 2007).

The aim of this study was to demonstrate how portfolio assessment was perceived by English teachers who were not using it. To this end, literature was reviewed to explicate how portfolio assessment was perceived in a variety of areas (Yancey, 2004; Caner, 2010; Soruc, 2011; Hashemian and Fadaei, 2013; Çardak & Böcük, 2015; Karakaya, 2015; Hamidi & Khatib, 2017; Cheng & Fox, 2017; Evin-Gencel, 2017; Avan & Şahin, 2020). Following the review, the methodology for the study was presented and the results were discussed to clarify the participant teachers' perceptions of portfolio assessment and their reasons for not using it. The study was concluded with implications for further research on portfolio assessment.

## **A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A portfolio is defined as a collection of products that students produce during the learning process (Evin-Gencel, 2017), and has three steps which are collection, selection and reflection (Cummins & Davesne, 2009; Bataineh and Obeiah, 2016). It is a systematic and purposeful compilation of learner work that represents the learners' developmental progress (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007) and experiences (Laughran and Corrigan, 1995). Kocoglu (2008) defines portfolios as a collection of information that displays what student teachers are capable of, and how they develop in their profession over time. It is a tool that can be used for self-expression (McDonald, 2012). Although portfolios are used to assess student development, they can serve teachers in terms of professional development as well (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003).

Portfolio has been defined as the practice of creating and collecting entries about one's professional interests and work (Darling, 2007). Students collect their works systematically and methodically in a folder under predetermined criteria, which provides an opportunity for observation of both students' improvements and weaknesses (Evin-Gencel, 2017). Borko, Michalec, Timmons, and Siddle (1997) stated that it promotes reflection. Use and construction of portfolios have been shown to promote interaction among peers and colleagues, which can lead to professional growth (Athanasas, 1994). They create opportunities for observation and evaluation of changes (Evin-Gencel, 2017).

Portfolio assessment is defined as an alternative assessment tool that was introduced due to a search for better techniques for assessment that value the process of development as well as the final

product (Evin-Gencel, 2017; Lynch and Shaw, 2005). It is the qualitative, student-focused nature of alternative assessment, as well as the blending together the teaching and assessing, and valuing both the process and the product that makes alternative assessment a valuable tool (Lynch, 2001). Laughran and Corrigan (1995) state that portfolio assessment is highly regarded because of its superiority in offering a gateway to the people's understanding and knowledge; therefore, forming better decisions in assessment. Lyons and Freidus (2004) regard portfolio assessment as a tool for documenting individual and professional work that could lead to the understanding of how learners progress through their journey of learning. Reflections in a portfolio also play a big role in developing an understanding of the self which is mentioned by many researchers as a key component of the learning experience (Nunan, 1995; Nunes, 2004; Lynch and Shaw, 2005; Kathpalia and Heah, 2008; Mogonea, 2015; Beckers, Dolmans & Merriënboer, 2021). In her study, Erozan (2005) found portfolio to be an effective tool in evaluating the learners' performance. Stone (1995) suggests that a portfolio is a tool that teachers can use effectively to determine the learners' instructional needs. Others too put forward some benefits of portfolio assessment such as enhancing student learning, aiding teachers in understanding students' needs and assessment (Brown and Hudson, 1998; Yin, 2013), enhance self-reflection skills, autonomy, metacognition, and motivation (Yin, 2013; Hung & Huang, 2012), and provide a sense of belonging (Hung & Huang, 2012).

Meyer and Tusin (1999) stated that teachers' purpose of using portfolios can differ. They state that teachers can use portfolios to evaluate the process or the product, and that is what renders them distinctive and complicated. They believe that what teachers aim to obtain by using portfolio will determine how they will use it. Similarly, Phung (2016) suggests that the contents and purpose of portfolio assessment, depending on whether the product is being presented or progress is being monitored, can vary. Being active participants themselves, students' objectives are also important in putting together a portfolio because "*they select the work they collected*" (Kaneko, 2020, p. 230). Kocoglu (2008) argues that the process of putting together a portfolio is iterative and that portfolios are effective tools for teacher candidates' professional development. Barton and Collins (1993) believe that the practice of developing portfolios can help teachers establish sound instructional repertoires and implement effective teaching practices. Shulman (1998) and Diaz-Maggioli (2003) state that a portfolio can reflect a teacher's teaching philosophy.

Portfolio assessment has been subject to many studies. Among the studies regarding portfolio assessment are the effects of portfolio assessment on teachers candidates' meta-cognitive skills and their attitudes toward a course (Evin-Gencel, 2017), teacher candidates' reflection of portfolio assessment (Genc and Tinmaz, 2010), student teachers' perception of e-portfolios' role in their professional development (Kocoglu, 2008), teachers' and students' perceptions of portfolio assessment in EFL contexts (Soruc, 2011), tertiary level students' reports on portfolio assessment (McDonald, 2012), teacher candidates' point of views about portfolio preparation (Bal, 2012), teachers' thoughts on the effects of putting together a portfolio of literacy instruction (Athanasas, 1994), pre-service teachers'

thoughts on portfolio assessment (Meyer and Tusin, 1999), the effect of portfolios in improving teachers' work (Khalil, 2014), learners' thoughts on portfolio assessment in writing classes (Caner, 2010) and the use of portfolio in teacher education programs in the US (Zeichner and Wray, 2001).

Portfolio-based assessment is seen to be frequently used in teacher training programmes. The purpose of portfolio use in teacher training is to facilitate teachers' self-observation and reflection skills, which can assist them in modifying their teaching practices and have a better grasp of their teaching philosophy (Shulman, 1998). Regarding teacher training programs, portfolios include items such as class assignments, lesson plans, feedback of teachers, reflection of one's own work and development, a dossier which contains a list of can-do descriptors regarding learners' competences, evidence from independent research conducted by the learners, detailed reports and checklists, record of work related to learners' education and their future aspirations. Lynch and Shaw (2005) believe that learners should be active participants throughout the processes of portfolio preparation and assessment. Learners should be included in determining the content of portfolio, reflection of this selection, self-assessment, peer assessment which can encourage collaboration (Dippold, 2009), and their involvement in deciding on criteria for evaluation. When learners are active participants, they have a clear vision as to how portfolios can contribute to the teaching-learning process (Karakaya, 2015). Learner recognition and an appreciation for their effort in the construction of portfolio from their supervisors are regarded to be of high importance in the process of portfolio assessment (Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). Darling (2007) puts it as "*being in the practice*", which she argues to evoke internal goods towards the practice itself. This process leads to conversations among peers and supervisors, which can be counted as a necessity for understanding what portfolio entails (Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). When these issues are taken into account, a portfolio can serve its purpose of assessing the process of portfolio construction and learners' development along with the final state of this development (Lynch and Shaw, 2005). When learners are actively engaged in the process of portfolio construction and assessment, their knowledge, skills, and performance are also positively influenced, which can promote critical and reflective thinking skills.

Portfolio assessment has been studied in many other programmes as well. Living in the age of technology, portfolios can be online (e-portfolio). There have been studies which investigate the implementation of electronic portfolios in a teacher education program (Wray, 2007), and the reflection of pre-service teachers on portfolio assessment. The audience of these studies range from Computer Education to Instructional Technology programmes. Genc and Tinmaz (2010) define e-portfolio as one of the newest evaluation techniques for new learning environments where students show their artefacts, products and projects to display their functional learning. A collection of students' texts and graphics can be in an e-portfolio. Studies (Lynch & Purnawarman, 2004) state that e-portfolios support learners' reflective thinking as well as paper and pencil portfolios. Bhattacharya and Hartnett (2007) state that the creation of e-portfolios enables students to document and track their learning. They can develop a better understanding of their learning experiences.

There is a variety of studies on portfolio construction and assessment. One study of portfolio assessment was conducted with learners who are majoring in English Language Teaching in a university in Lebanon by Bahous (2008). The results indicate that using portfolios for assessment purposes was more effective than traditional assessment (Bahous, 2008). Active engagement on self-assessed portfolios showed its benefits in many ways. While some students complained that portfolio preparation was a lot of work, boring, and very challenging, some found it quite easy and fun. Some students stated that self-assessment “*made them want to give their best*” for the course (Bahous, 2008, p.388). Some shared their enthusiasm for using portfolio assessment in their own teaching in the future. Students worked in pairs and groups for some projects in this process, which resulted in more interaction with peers and new friendships. Being a scaffold in forming friendships and active interaction between individuals can be seen as one of the important benefits of portfolio assessment (Tartwijk and Driessen, 2009). In their study on the effects of scaffolding-based instruction and portfolio-based assessment on EFL students’ writing performance and sub-skills, Bataineh and Obeiah (2016) found that the group which was taught through scaffolding-based instruction and portfolio-based assessment outperformed the other group in their performance.

While studies show that portfolio assessment has positive outcomes for students, it is also debated that using portfolio assessment has its challenges. A study by Lynch and Purnawarman (2004), which investigates the use of e-portfolio assessment in educational and instructional technology programs in the US, shows that portfolio assessment is not used appropriately in most of those programs. They were reported to lack accurate evaluation rubrics and reflective papers. Fenwick and Parsons (1999) state that portfolios are challenging and a lot of work. Moreover, they believe that portfolios might not be taken seriously by learners if they are not graded. Karakaya (2015) stated that peer assessment cannot be reliable if learners are not objective in their assessment of themselves and their peers. Darling-Hammond et al. (1995) also argued the reliability of portfolios in displaying the work of the individual, for the portfolio can be an assembly of imitative products. In order for individuals, learners, teachers and teacher trainees to have portfolios that represent their genuine work, clear and internal goals must be set (Darling, 2007).

Portfolios are frequently used in Teacher Training programmes. As Shulman (1998) argued, portfolios are beneficial tools for candidate or experienced teachers to reflect on their teaching philosophy and come to a better understanding of their teaching practices. Meyer and Tusin (1999) also stated that professional portfolios for teacher evaluation contributed to the participants’ (pre-service teachers) understanding of portfolio which will influence their future classroom practices. In her study, Bal (2012) found that portfolio was an effective tool for prospective teacher in developing their creative thinking skills. They are also effective assessment tools for teachers to use for their learners. Through portfolios, both student and professional, teachers can reflect on their practices (Meyer and Tusin, 1999;

Caner, 2010) and evaluate their students (Neimeyer, 1993). Lyons and Freidus (2004) also believe that portfolios promote reflective interrogation that forms a gateway to self-study.

Kan (2007) defines portfolio as a tool that assesses not only the students but the entire educational policy. Meyer and Tusin (1999) too, make suggestions as to how portfolios can be integrated into teacher education programmes and proposes that helping student teachers make a connection between the uses of portfolio and their beliefs on teaching should be a goal of teacher education programs (p. 138).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do English teachers who are not using portfolios as an assessment tool perceive portfolio assessment?
2. What are the reasons that teachers are or are not using portfolios as an assessment tool in their own teaching practices?

### **Methodology**

This study aimed to find out English teachers' perceptions of portfolio assessment and why they aren't using it for assessment. The data for this study were collected qualitatively by using an open-ended questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview for backchannelling the information given by the teachers to increase the quality criteria for the study. A case study design was adopted.

During the data collection procedure when contacted and asked to participate in the portfolio assessment study, participant teacher 1 (P1) asked what portfolio assessment was and requested some explanation. The emergence of this realization during the data collection process necessitated an addition to the questionnaire, which consisted of a part that defined portfolio, its use, and benefits according to the literature (appendix 2). Three examples of e-portfolio were also provided for teachers to help them get a grasp of portfolio assessment. The emergent nature of the qualitative designed allowed for enough flexibility to make changes and additions to the data collection tool (Dörnyei, 2007).

Based on the objectives of the study, two research questions were asked that inquire English teachers' perceptions of portfolio assessment, and the reasons they were not using it as an assessment tool. The questions in the open-ended questionnaire and the follow-up interview questions were prepared accordingly to satisfy the curiosity posed by the research questions.

The participants answered seven questions in the open-ended survey which inquired their background knowledge of portfolio assessment (first part), if they had used or were using portfolio assessment in their practices (second part) and what their perceptions of portfolio assessment were (third part). The rationale behind using an open-ended questionnaire was to give participants extra room to

further explain their thoughts on the issue and deepen our understanding (Creswell, 2003). The questions were prepared by the researcher in this study.

Following the questionnaire, each participant was interviewed for about 10 minutes and was asked additional questions for further clarification that could contribute to the depth of the data. The interview was semi-structured; the questions partly differed for each participant at the time of the interview, as each participant provided unique answers that necessitated different follow-up questions. Necessary permissions were obtained by the school management and participants. The permission of each participant was recorded at the beginning of the interviews in order not to disrupt the flow of the conversations (Dörnyei, 2007).

## **Instruments**

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions for each participant were as follows:

For the first participant teacher (P1)

1. How long have you been collecting your work?
2. Why are you prompting your students to do something similar?
3. Why haven't you used it as an assessment tool?
4. Have you observed any changes in your students as a result of portfolio preparation (portfolio in the sense that P1 implemented)?
5. Do you think getting the students to become active participants in this process contributes to their development or not?

For the second participant teacher (P2)

1. You wrote in the questionnaire that you had never been assessed through portfolio, and you stated this as the reason why you are not using it currently. Is that correct?
2. Can we say that if you had been assessed through portfolios in your university years, you would be using it in your teaching, as you stated in the questionnaire?
3. You are saying maybe, so should I understand that you have doubts about portfolio assessment?
4. Do you think student profile and context of teaching are influential in using portfolio assessment?
5. Can we say that you'd be willing to use portfolio assessment in the future or do you feel like it wouldn't be your first choice?

For the third participant teacher (P3)

1. Can you elaborate on your experience with portfolios as a teacher? How did you use it?
2. Was there any feedback from you students?



3. Did portfolio assessment contribute to your own learning as a teacher? If so, how?
4. Would you consider using portfolios for assessment if you had more flexibility in the curriculum?
5. Do you think collaborating with colleagues during this process would create better outcomes? How?

Following the collection of data, each participant's answers were analysed, and certain themes and categories were found. The analysis of the participants' perceptions and reasons for (not) using portfolio assessment were carried out under the categories that had emerged and presented in the results section as separate cases so that a fuller understanding of each teacher's perception of portfolio assessment could be gained. The results were further discussed in the discussion part.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

The participants were three English teachers in a vocational school in the Aegean part of Turkey. They were graduates of different English language programs such as American studies, English philology, and translation/ interpretation. They were selected purposefully since the aim of the study was to understand portfolios from the perspective of English teachers who were not using portfolio assessment.

Two of the participants were not familiar with portfolio assessment. Those participants hadn't had any experience with portfolios as learners, nor had used it as a teacher. In fact, it was the first time that they had heard of portfolio assessment as an assessment tool. Participant 3 (P3) was the only teacher who had had experience with portfolio assessment both as a learner and a teacher.

Although the number of participants was small; the aim was to collect rich qualitative data which would yield valuable results to the literature in understanding of how teachers with different backgrounds perceive portfolio assessment, a comparison between those perceptions, and what reasons they present for not using it as an assessment tool, which could also help understand their values in teaching.

## **RESULTS**

After analysing the open-ended questionnaire and the interview, certain themes emerged, which were details about their background as learners and teachers, how they think portfolio can contribute to the teaching and learning process, possible drawbacks, and difficulties of using portfolio assessment. Then these themes were gathered under broader categories; participants' background as learners and teachers, benefits of portfolio, reasons for not using portfolio with a subcategory as necessities for future implementation. The following case by case analysis was carried out under these categories. The categorization allowed for a more comprehensive and richer analysis.

## Case 1

### 1. Teacher's Background

Participant 1 (P1) had a three-year experience as an English teacher in tertiary level. She provided ample information for the study both in the questionnaire and interview. She seemed keen to explain her thoughts, as she stated she investigated the issue further after the open-ended questionnaire by looking at her previous collection of work and reflected on it. She was not familiar with portfolio assessment.

### 2. Benefits of Using Portfolio Assessment

P1 stated in the questionnaire once more that she was not familiar with portfolio assessment; however, it seemed easier for her to understand portfolio and portfolio assessment. She said that after having read the definition of Portfolio Assessment, she realized that she had been doing something which had some similarities to portfolios, throughout her academic life both as a student and a teacher. It was keeping all her teaching materials “*since the beginning of her career*”, keeping SETTs (self-evaluation of teacher talk), along with reflections on her teaching and learning.

Having read her answers, it can be said that even though she was not familiar with portfolio assessment, she had similar practices and experience which had similar goals as portfolio assessment, which was to reflect on oneself throughout the process of collecting portfolio to critically examine the learning or teaching processes and develop a better understanding towards them.

P1 was not using portfolio assessment “*in its strict definition*”, therefore, she did not use a set of predetermined standards for product assessment. However, she was asking her learners to file and save both their written and oral productions of their lesson for reflection and academic development. The main concern for P1 was to monitor and learn from the process itself because she benefitted a similar experience of keeping SETTs, reflections, and all classroom materials together with students' work. She shared her thoughts on the content and duration of portfolio as well by stressing that teachers might choose to implement portfolio assessment in different ways based on their values as teachers, and students, being active participants in this process, might differ in their collection of work based on their values and expectations out of portfolio; “*Some people might choose quality over quantity, or vice versa. It (portfolio) might be large or narrow in scope. It could be a 1-month work or a-year-long collection of work. Their purposes might differ in that some people might choose to collect only lesson or field-oriented pieces of their work, on the other hand some might prefer to collect any work that they find valuable for their academic growth.*”

The process of saving written and oral work enabled students to “*build self-awareness and autonomy over their learning process*” and assist them in realizing their strengths and weaknesses. As

a teacher, keeping record of her work and development helped her develop self-awareness about her teaching and improve her skills as a teacher. It provided internal motivation for both the teacher and the student because “*the best type of realization is to witness your students see their own development*”. Familiarization with portfolio as an assessment tool made her view her practice of putting together pieces of writing and independent work in a different perspective. It is “*a highly organized way of developing self-awareness for both students and teachers*”. It can have positive outcomes which she listed as increased motivation to participate in tasks, and reflection of the learning process, which can have a reciprocity in their relationship (Kim, 2019).

Reflection can also help students develop a better understanding of themselves as learners (Antón & Pendexter, 2021). P1 stated that portfolio assessment was very effective in developing self-awareness- her development as a learner- and language awareness- her use of linguistic elements, which she defined to be a key component of learning in all areas.

Her overall perception of portfolio and portfolio assessment was rather positive. Having carried out similar work during her education and teaching career, she clearly adopted the belief that portfolio work is motivating and stimulating for both learners and teachers.

### 3. Reasons For Not Using Portfolio

Each teacher expressed their own reasons for not using portfolio assessment. P1 expressed that she had been asking students to keep their work to observe their development, however she was not aware of portfolio assessment; therefore, did not know that her implementation had similarities with it. Her reason was her unawareness of portfolio assessment. She also expressed her concern for lack of responsibility and motivation to prepare a portfolio for some students. It seemed to be a demotivating factor for P1.

#### 3.1 Necessities for Future Implementation

The first necessity for P1 was the need to carefully plan all the components of a portfolio assessment process. She stressed that the assessment and reflection parts needed to be carefully organized. If carefully planned, portfolio assessment could be motivating, awareness-building and it could easily be implemented.

Her second focus was the need to be more systematic. She stated that when she compared her work to the sample e-portfolios given in the summary on portfolio assessment, she saw that her implementation was “*more freestyle*”, by which she meant unsystematic. Her take on portfolio appeared to be progress oriented, which created internal motivation both in her students and herself as a teacher and learner. However, it did not have a systematic assessment; there were not any criteria determined

prior to the assessment. P1 concluded her remarks saying that she could implement portfolio assessment, as defined in the literature, in a more systematic and organized way.

P1 also remarked on the benefits of paper-based portfolios by referring to research on the importance and cognitively complementary effects of writing by hand in learning process. Even though she perceived e-portfolios to be eco-friendly and equally beneficial, preparing her students and the lesson content for the implementation of a paper-based portfolio seemed to be a necessity and a precondition for P1.

## Case 2

P2 had eight years of teaching in tertiary level. She too was not familiar with portfolio assessment. Therefore, she expressed that she had never used it before. She stated that her teacher training courses did not include portfolio assessment. She attributed her unfamiliarity with portfolio assessment to the fact that she had not studied English Language Teaching and that she was mainly interested in Linguistics. As a direct consequence of not being familiar with portfolio assessment, she also stated that she had no experience with it as a teacher. Her overall attitude insinuated that she felt insecure about not using portfolio assessment and was trying to express her reasons for not implementing it. It was not the intention to worry the participants into this sort of thinking. However, P2 showed such an attitude towards the inquiry on portfolio assessment. Therefore, the follow-up interview was initiated with statements that highlight the purpose of the study clearer; *“The purpose of this study is not to make criticisms or comments on the participants’ use of assessment tools, nor make suggestions as to the superiority of portfolio assessment”*. It was this participant alone that necessitated such an explanation.

### 1. Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

Even though she had never been assessed through portfolio nor used it in her teaching practices, she thought that *“it might help the teacher keep track of each student’s progress”*. She stressed that using PA for writing classes could be *“more appropriate”*. Using portfolio assessment could have positive outcomes which she listed as promoting growth, a beneficial tool to track progress and find out weaknesses (Abrami and Barrett, 2005). P2 shared her thoughts on the benefits of e-portfolio by stressing the mobility of the teachers.

P2 listed the least number of benefits for portfolio assessment due to her lack of experience with it. Even though she specified some portfolio characteristics which are stated in the literature, and which were also articulated by the other participant teachers, she did not have as many comments and thoughts on it as the other teachers, one of whom was familiar with portfolio assessment and the other seemed to understand the concept thanks to her classroom implementations similar to portfolio.

### 2. Reasons for Not Using Portfolio Assessment

Like P1, P2 did not have a background on portfolio assessment which was her main argument as to why she had never used it nor was using it. She stressed this in the open-ended questionnaire by sharing her background as a learner, her interests, and reasons related to the institution she had worked and was working. To be more specific, not being an ELT graduate, being interested in linguistics, and never having an in-service training were her reasons regarding the unfamiliarity with portfolio assessment.

Additionally, she shared her concerns with the content and use of portfolio assessment. By content, what is meant was the kind of work to be put in the portfolio and how to decide it. And by use of portfolio, types of lessons it can be used in such as speaking, writing, grammar lessons, etc. These concerns seemed to result in a hesitancy to use PA for her lessons, as understood from her questions and comments.

### 3. Necessities for Future Implementation

P2 restated her lack of knowledge on portfolio assessment and added that she would like to learn further about portfolio assessment if it “*really serves the benefits of the learners*”. Her questioning manner is understandable because she hasn’t had any experience with it.

Her answers were brief in the parts about the use of portfolio in her teaching practices, and the main reason, which was unfamiliarity with PA, was voiced repetitively. The desire to be educated on portfolio assessment was often articulated, too. She used the interview as a chance to further inquire into the details of PA during the interview. The themes that emerged from the interview with P2 were as follows; the content of portfolio assessment, the assessment criteria, types of lessons it could be used for (speaking, grammar), whether it could be used in an ESP context, and the duration of keeping portfolio.

Lastly, P2 stated that she did not know any other alternatives. It could be because she felt confident enough in her current practices and did not feel the need to implement anything different. She couldn’t say if it would be her first choice due to lack of experience with portfolio assessment. However, she stated that she would like to use it in the upcoming years now that she was aware of it.

## Case 3

### 1. Background

P3 had thirteen years of teaching experience in tertiary education. She differed in that she was familiar with portfolio assessment. She stated that she had been assessed through portfolio before; however, “*it was not an assessment with a set of detailed standards*”.

P2, unlike other participants, had used portfolio assessment in her writing classes. She specified that she assessed her students “*through constructed assessment forms*”, as an essential part of portfolio (Diaz-Maggioli, 2003), for their work in writing classes.

## 2. Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

P3 shared her thought on the benefits of portfolio assessment based on her experience with it as a learner and a teacher. The benefits of portfolio assessment were mainly affective for her. She stated that after being assessed through portfolio, it motivated her and helped her feel confident about her learning process and her overall development as a learner.

Having had a positive experience with portfolio assessment as a learner, she proceeded to use it as a teacher as well. She stated that in her previous institution, portfolios were used in writing classes to assess both the process and product. As a teacher she too was concerned with her students' learning process and stressed that portfolios should focus more on the process rather than the product. P3 showed that she valued the process of learning using portfolios during which students can develop an awareness about their weaknesses.

P3 believes that teachers benefit from portfolio assessment by observing their students' improvement and reflections. She suggested that students' progress mirror teachers' practices. Therefore, she sees portfolio assessment as a tool for teachers to pinpoint the problems about teaching practices and solve those problems. In other words, P3 states that portfolio assessment as a tool that provides teachers with information about what they should focus on to better their teaching practices to meet the needs of the learners (Antón & Pendexter, 2021). In that, she stressed that portfolio assessment served a bigger purpose (Wortham et al., 1998).

P3 also stressed that portfolio assessment was a useful tool in getting students to become active participants and monitor their own learning. It was understood that like P1, P3 also valued student autonomy and responsibility over their learning.

P3 stated that having some predetermined assessment criteria was necessary for teachers due to possible differences between teachers; *“some teachers can make it a little bit flexible, and some teachers can make it a little bit strict with their students.”* This difference between teachers can create a problem such as discrepancies between learners' work and assessment, thus the reliability of the portfolios can be jeopardized. Therefore, having a standard that all teachers can follow was stressed as a necessary component of portfolio assessment.

Collaboration appeared to be another important area for P3. She found it essential for teachers to ask for and give advice to each other. She stressed that collaboration could create better solutions both for teachers and students, which was articulated by researchers (Newby, Allan, Fenner, Jones,, Komorowska, & Soghikyan, 2007) as well.

It was also pointed out that some teachers might prefer not to use portfolio assessment or have troubles creating their syllabi. Collaboration would benefit everyone in determining the content of the syllabi or the kind of assessment that is deemed beneficial for the learners.

### 3. Reasons for Not Using It

Her case is more interesting in that even though she knows portfolio assessment and have used and benefitted from it both as a teacher and a student, she stated that she wasn't using it in her teaching. She explained the reason why she wasn't using portfolio assessment by stating that there were many variables that affected her such as being new to the context and syllabi, and her priorities as a teacher. Her focus was on grammar teaching, for which she did not find portfolio assessment necessary. P3 was *"was trying to teach her students the target points that were required in the syllabus"*. Inflexibility and the demanding nature of curriculum and the need to be caught up with it was one of the reasons for not taking up an alternative assessment.

### 4. Necessities for Future Implementation

For P3, having a syllabus where portfolio assessment can be integrated was the number one necessity. She expressed that the content of the lesson syllabus needed to be prepared and readied for such assessment. The focus points of the lesson needed to be clarified, so that the content of the portfolio could be determined as well.

Secondly, having clear assessment criteria was articulated as essential for both teachers and students. P3 expressed that without clear guidelines on how to assess student portfolios, assessment might not be reliable because each teacher determines what to assign and how to assess according to their values and beliefs.

## DISCUSSION

The three participants agreed on the benefits of portfolio assessment. They remarked on the benefits of portfolio assessment both on learners and teachers. They said that portfolio assessment could help learners monitor their learning (Lyons and Freidus, 2004). Putting together a portfolio and self-monitoring of the learning process could lead to having a critical eye and reflect on the learning process; how learners manage their own learning process (Nunes, 2004; Lyons and Freidus, 2004; Mogonea, 2015; Beckers, Dolmans & Merriënboer, 2021).

Teachers stated that they believed portfolio assessment can help build self-confidence (Çardak & Böcük, 2015) because learners are actively participating in the teaching-learning process and selecting the contents of their portfolio (Kaneko, 2020). This can foster a sense of involvement in the process, which can motivate learners in their learning adventure (Hung & Huang, 2012).

It was remarked by the teachers that portfolio assessment can create quality interaction between their peers and themselves (Borko et al., 1997; Athanases, 1994) because they would be reflecting on one another's portfolios. Self-reflections in portfolios are given much importance because through self-reflection learners communicate with themselves to understand themselves and their experiences in the learning process (Antón & Pendexter, 2021, p. 167). It was also articulated by the teachers that portfolio can create quality interaction between learners and teachers because it prompts communication between parties and fosters the collaborative "*construction of meaning*" (Antón & Pendexter, 2021, p. 167).

All the teachers believed that portfolio assessment could aid learners in becoming autonomous learners (Caner, 2010; Lam, 2014). They found the process of putting together a portfolio effective in prompting learners to use their own linguistic resources, and in interaction between peers and with teachers to support the teaching-learning process at the end of which learners could become more autonomous and feel an ownership over their own learning (Antón & Pendexter, 2021; Hung & Huang, 2012).

The teachers found portfolio and portfolio assessment beneficial for practising teachers, as well. They stated that portfolio assessment could help teachers determine the learners' instructional needs (Yin, 2013) because how learners progress and what they produce will mirror their teaching. Through portfolios, it might be possible to understand teachers' understanding and knowledge towards assessment, or philosophy of teaching (Laughran and Corrigan, 1995). This could facilitate reflection skills to have a better grasp of their teaching philosophy (Shulman, 1998), which could help teachers establish sound instructional repertoires and implement effective teaching practices and assessment techniques (Barton and Collins, 1993). By reflecting on their teaching, teachers can realize their values in the teaching-learning process and determine how they prefer to use an assessment technique such as portfolio; process, product or both (Meyer and Tusin, 1999; Phung, 2016).

All of the participants in this study stressed the importance of the process and being able to monitor (both by the students and teachers) learning, however, they stated that they valued both the process and the product, which Cheng and Fox (2017) state to be stronger together.

These mutual ideas were interesting in that they were uttered by teachers who were not using portfolio assessment. What was more interesting is that two of the teachers did not have any experience with it nor had heard of it. Even though, portfolio assessment was not being used, it was found self-improving, confidence building, and deemed a tool to foster autonomy (Lam, 2014; Çardak & Böcük, 2015; Beckers, Dolmans & Merriënboer, 2021).

There were however certain concerns that the teachers had towards the implementation of portfolio assessment, which could be the reason why participant three (P3) was not using portfolio assessment, and why participants one and two (P1 and P2) thought using portfolio assessment could be challenging.



P1 was concerned about lack of student motivation to put together a portfolio. This she remarked on by saying that “*lack of student motivation and responsibility to complete such a task (portfolio) might create challenges for the teachers in turn*”. As a learner and teacher who kept record of her work without the component of assessment, she highlighted the importance of voluntary work and reflection (Lyons and Freidus, 2004) and their effect on her development. Her second concern was the systematicity of using portfolios (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007). She criticized her way of collecting student work as “*more of a freestyle way*”, which suggested that she valued careful planning and being systematic greatly (Evin-Gencel, 2017).

P2 was concerned about the application of portfolio assessment; how to design portfolio, how to decide on the assessment criteria, and for which lessons it was possible to use portfolio assessment. P3 was concerned about institutional demands. She stated that the demanding nature of the curriculum hindered her from using portfolios and that careful planning of all the components of portfolio assessment was of great importance. Using portfolio assessment would be possible only with the improvement of the circumstances.

It is stated that portfolio assessment is a detailed and systematic process, and it needs careful planning (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007; Evin-Gencel, 2017). The participants in this study also concur that such requirements are to be met to use portfolios in their assessment. Therefore, teachers’ unreadiness could be inferred as the overall reason why they were not using portfolios in their teaching. Unfamiliarity at this point could not be inferred as the main reason of not using portfolio assessment since participant three (P3) had experience with it both as a learner and a teacher.

Cheng & Fox (2017) believe that teachers’ values and beliefs are interconnected with the assessment methods they use. Even though the participants were not using portfolio assessment, their perceptions revealed that they attached great value to reflection of one’s learning, learners’ language awareness, and autonomy, all of which can contribute to the learning process (Borko et al., 1997; Lynch and Shaw, 2005; Kocoglu, 2008). They stated that it was an assessment tool they would “*definitely*” use in the future.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this case study was to understand how teachers of English viewed portfolio assessment and why they were not implementing it in their teaching. Participants’ views were collected via an open-ended questionnaire followed by individual interviews. The three participants’ answers were documented as separate cases and later discussed under certain categories that had emerged as a result of analysis and coding. The results indicated that two of the participants (P1 and P2) were not aware of portfolio assessment, while one of the participants (P3) was. It was found that the main reasons why participants do not use portfolios for assessment were that they were unaware of such assessment, and

that they did not feel knowledgeable enough or ready to implement such an assessment for their classes. Overall, the emerging thoughts on portfolio assessment were that it could be challenging due to reasons such as students' lack of responsibility and motivation to complete such a task, which could create challenges for the teachers in turn, institutional demands such as strictly following the curriculum, and completing the requirements of portfolio assessment before implementing.

It was also found that portfolio assessment would be implemented more efficiently in collaboration with colleagues. All the participants expressed that portfolio assessment seemed to be an effective tool for assessment. They found it to be effective mostly in enabling collaboration, promoting self-reflection, observing one's professional development, and autonomy (Dippold, 2009; Lam, 2014; Çardak & Böcük, 2015; Cheng & Fox, 2017). Teachers remarked that it was important to remember that learners differ in their learning styles and ways (Nunan, 1995). Portfolio assessment was found to be an effective tool that values individual differences and helps to develop each learner at their own style and pace (Kan, 2007).

### **Implications for further research**

It is suggested that the assertions that were made throughout the study be investigated further. This case study might clarify some points such as whether English teachers from different backgrounds are aware of portfolio assessment, if so, what their perceptions are of this type of assessment, and why they are/ are not using portfolio assessment in their teaching. However, since it is a case study, it is not a wide scale study, so it cannot be representative of a wider group of language teachers. Portfolio assessment, beginning to have prominence in the 1990s, is now recognized more with the need for tools for assessment that can promote better learning and professional development (Kan, 2007). Therefore, further studies that can focus on both the quality and quantity of the practice of portfolio assessment for English teachers might add valuable information to the literature and offer insights for the curious.

Secondly, as seen in the literature, portfolio assessment started out in art and evolved towards the field of education. It is a versatile tool of assessment, and it can be used in various areas. Use of portfolio assessment, although very prominent in English language teaching and teacher education (Evin-Gencel, 2017; Kocoglu, 2008; Zeichner and Wray, 2001; Khalil, 2014; Meyer and Tusin, 1999; Athanases, 1994), is not exclusive to those areas. It can be incorporated to other language teaching contexts. Research on different contexts of language teaching can be pursued.

Finally, portfolio assessment is concerned with the learning process and product or outcome of learners (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003). Its effects on learners in terms of cognitive and meta-cognitive development and learners' perception of portfolio assessment have been studied by many (Caner, 2010; Soruc, 2011; McDonald, 2012). However, further studies can be carried out regarding the effects of portfolio assessment in different contexts such as those where English is

taught for specific purposes (ESP). It can be interesting and enlightening to see how portfolios are perceived by learners, how effective, if at all, they are for learners' linguistic and academic development.

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## APPENDIX

### 1. Open-ended Questionnaire

#### Questionnaire on English Teachers' Perceptions of Portfolio Assessment

Thank you for taking the time to answer the following questions and participating in this study. The survey asks about your background on portfolio preparation and assessment, whether you are integrating it as an assessment tool and your thoughts on the effects of portfolio preparation and assessment. Your responses will be anonymous and will be used for this study alone. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender:

Years of teaching:

#### Questions about background:

1. Are you familiar with a type of assessment that is called *Portfolio Assessment*?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you ever been assessed through portfolio preparation throughout your education?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. If yes, can you explain whether it has contributed to your professional development or not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Have you ever used portfolio assessment in your own teaching?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. Why? Why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions about practice:

4. Are you currently implementing portfolio assessment in your lessons?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. If yes, what is/are the objective(s) that you are aiming to achieve through portfolio assessment?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
b. If no, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Would you consider using portfolio assessment in your teaching in the future?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. Why? Why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions about perception:

6. Do you think portfolio preparation can have positive outcomes in terms of learners' development?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. If yes, in what ways?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
b. If no, why not?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Portfolios can be online. Do you think e-portfolios would be better for learners?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
a. If so, in what ways do you think it would be better?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
b. If not, in what ways do you think it would not be?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Important Note:** If you are not familiar with portfolio assessment, below you can find a detailed explanation and some sample work.

**What is a portfolio?**

A portfolio is defined as a collection of products that students produce during the learning process that creates an opportunity for learners, their peers, families, and teachers, to observe and evaluate changes over time (Gencel, 2017). It is a systematic and purposeful compilation of learner work that represents the learners' developmental progress (Bhattacharya and Hartnett, 2007). Students collect their works systematically and methodically in a folder under predetermined criteria, which provides an opportunity for observation of both students' improvements and weaknesses (Gencel, 2017, p.2). Portfolio assessment is defined as an alternative assessment technique as a result of the search for better techniques for assessment that value the process of development as well as the final product (Lynch and Shaw, 2005; Gencel, 2017).

Portfolio-based assessment is frequently used in teacher education programmes. The items collected by the students include class assignments, lesson plans, feedback of teachers, reflection of one's own work and development, a dossier which contains a list of can-do descriptors regarding learners' competences, evidence from independent research conducted by the learners, detailed reports and checklists, record of work related to learners' education and their future profession. Lynch and Shaw (2005) state that learners should be active participants throughout the portfolio preparation and assessment processes. They should be active in determining what to include in the portfolio, reflection of this selection, peer and self-assessment, and their involvement in deciding on criteria for evaluation. This way a portfolio can serve its purpose, which is to assess the process of development along with the final state of this development (Lynch and Shaw, 2005). When learners are actively engaged in the process of portfolio preparation and assessment, their knowledge, skill and performance are also positively influenced, which can promote critical and reflective thinking skills.

Portfolio assessment has been used in other programmes as well. Living in the age of technology, portfolios can be online (e-portfolio) and there have been studies which investigate the reflection of pre-service teachers', who are from Computer Education and Instructional Technology departments, on portfolio assessment. Genç and Tinnmaz (2010) define e-portfolio as one of the newest evaluation techniques for new learning environments where students show their artifacts, products and projects to display their functional learning. A collection of students' texts and graphics can be in an e-portfolio. Lynch & Purnawarman (2004) state that e-portfolios support learners' reflective thinking. Bhattacharya and Hartnett (2007) state that the creation of e-portfolios enables students to document and track their learning. They can develop a better understanding of their learning experiences.

Another study of portfolio assessment was conducted with learners who are majoring in Education or English in a university in Lebanon. The results indicate that using portfolios for assessment purposes was more effective than traditional assessment (Bahous, 2008). Active engagement on self-assessed portfolios was beneficial in many ways. While some students complained that portfolio preparation was a lot of work, boring, and very challenging, some found it quite easy and fun. Some students stated that self-assessment "made them want to give their best" for the course. Some stated that they would use portfolio assessment in their own teaching in the future. Students worked in pairs and groups for some projects in this process, which resulted in more interaction with peers and new friendships.

Portfolio assessment has been subject to many studies including cognitive skills development, metacognitive skills development, attitudes toward a course, students perception of e-portfolios' role in their professional development, teachers' and students' perceptions of portfolio assessment in EFL contexts, teacher candidates' point of views about portfolio preparation, self-assessment of upper level language arts students using portfolios and the efficacy of e-portfolio design and development in higher education.

Here are some links for you to check out some e-portfolios that are accessible online:

<http://sydmacrae.weebly.com/>

<http://teacherowley.weebly.com/>

<https://nathancomstock.weebly.com/>