

**ACADEMIC E-PORTFOLIO**

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The aim of the article is to explore the concept of e-learning and e-Portfolio as a relatively new instrument of schooling with its advantages and possible disadvantages. In particular, the author tries to attract the attention to the role and importance of academic portfolios. The portfolio serves as a means of monitoring students` authentic learning, guiding the student to reflect on his/her own work and giving him/her the opportunity to decide on the quality of the work done. The KEGA project "e-Portfolio as Pedagogy Facilitating Integrative Learning" (012EU-4/ 2023) carried out at the University of Economics, Faculty of Applied Languages, Bratislava and the Trnava University, Faculty of Education, Trnava, is presented in the second part of the article.

**Keywords:** assessment, authentic learning, e-portfólio, feedback, higher education, monitoring.

**Abstrakt**

Cieľom daného príspevku je preskúmať koncept e-štúdia a e-portfolia ako pomerne nového nástroja vo vyučovacom procese s jeho prospešnými znakmi a tiež možnými nevýhodami. Autorka sa snaží upriamiť pozornosť predovšetkým na miesto a význam akademického e-portfólia. Portfólio slúži ako prostriedok na monitorovanie autentického (skutočného) učenia sa, vedie študenta k reflexii vlastnej práce a dáva mu možnosť rozhodnúť o kvalite vykonanej práce. V druhej časti článku je predstavený projekt KEGA "e-Portfólio ako pedagogika podporujúca integrovanú výučbu" (012EU-4/ 2023) realizovaný na Fakulte aplikovaných jazykov Ekonomickej univerzity v Bratislave a na Pedagogickej fakulte Trnavskej univerzity v Trnave.

**Kľúčové slová:** hodnotenie, autentické učenie, e-portfólio, spätná väzba, vysokoškolské vzdelávanie, monitorovanie.

**Introduction**

Information about student learning can be assessed through both direct and indirect measures. Direct measures may include homework, quizzes, exams, reports, essays, research projects, case study analysis, and rubrics for oral and other performances. Examples of indirect measures include course evaluations, student surveys, course enrolment information, retention in the major, alumni surveys, and graduate school placement rates.

Methods of measuring student learning are often characterized as summative or formative assessments. Summative assessments - tests, quizzes, and other graded course activities that are used to measure student performance. They are cumulative and often reveal what students have learned at the end of a unit or the end of a course. Within a course, summative assessment includes the system for calculating individual student grades. Formative assessment include any means by which students receive input and guiding feedback on their relative performance to help them improve. It can be provided face-to-face in office hours, in written comments on assignments, through rubrics, and through emails.

With the arrival of electronic media as an important instrument in any sphere of the human activity, including education, the new trends toward authentic assessment of student learning were observed already in 1990s. That anticipated that educators would need to have clear purposes and comprehensible procedures for students to collect work samples over time, store them efficiently, and ultimately select them as the messages about themselves. The e-portfolio,

complete with multimedia, including audio and video evidence and student reflection, has since transformed the landscape of authentic assessment. Advances and availability of technology have brought many more opportunities for educators as well as learners.

Rather than assessment *of* student learning, the portfolio is in many cases positioned as representing assessment *for* student learning. It gives the opportunity to explore the innovation presented in e-portfolio as a number of ideas, resources, procedures for safely “sailing” a student into cyberspace.

In this article e-portfolio as a new instrument in schooling is described, its importance for many in the educational process is addressed, especially with the focus on academic portfolios. The KEGA project “ePortfolio as Pedagogy Facilitating Integrative Learning“ carried out at the University of Economics and Trnava university is introduced as well.

### **Portfolio as a valuable assessment tool**

The richness of the portfolio as a valuable tool in schooling has become evident throughout the world. As portfolios have been introduced to educational processes, implemented, and modified, they have been defined and redefined mostly “*as a container of evidence about and for student achievement*” (Belgrad – Burke – Fogarty, 2008, xiii). Increasingly, they are viewed as a platform or scaffolding for analysis, reflection and a kind of conversation about students' work. At the same time, implementing an effective portfolio is not only about analyses, students' reflections, but it is a very complex system, and can be time consuming for many, especially at the outset.

Academic portfolios have been defined in numerous ways. One of them describes academic portfolios as “*containers or compendiums of specifically selected student work that meets the stated purposes of the assessment process – notably, student work representing a selection of performances*” (Belgrad, Burke, Fogarty, 2008, xiii). Hebert describes the experience with portfolios as “*one of discovery in which students, faculty, and parents recognize that the real contents of a portfolio are the child's thoughts and his or her reasons for selecting a particular entry*” (Hebert, 1998, p. 583). Black and William believe that “*portfolios promote evidence and dialogue to identify where pupils are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there*” (Black – William, 1998, p. 7). They argue that portfolios work best when they are seen as a principal means of assessing for learning rather than simply evaluation of learning. But portfolios can achieve both assessment and evaluation. Black and William believe that educators who use portfolios in the studying process provide “*clear evidence about how to drive up individual attainment, clear feedback for and from pupils so there is clarity on what they need to improve and how best they can do so*” (Black, William, 1998, p. 8)

While portfolios and e-portfolios are considered to be a form of alternative assessment that include samples of student performance, they can also be an alternative form of evaluation. They include scores on formal tests on which students reflect, they also set goals for future academic attainment. The key function of portfolios is promoting ongoing process for both – students as well as teachers. They are continually and constantly reviewing the contents of the portfolio any time of the day in their comfort and at their pace. There are clear standards and criteria for selection of the most representative artifacts at predetermined times of the year and student voice, self-reflection, and self-evaluation are always present.

The notion of a portfolio as a systematic process of students' self-assessment and reflection on what they know as well as their learning achievement, has gained increasing agreement in recent years all over the world. The term "portfolio" has been used in the school environment with regard to pupil/student assessment since the 1990s. Not only has it expanded to the process of students' performance and evaluation, it enables monitoring, documenting and evaluating the learning process in detail. An electronic portfolio allows documents to be efficiently stored on the hard disk of a computer, on portable disks, in database centres etc. Not

only does it take up little physical space, but it also allows one to work efficiently and analyse a large amount of information. A large number of documents can be scanned and saved.

Electronic portfolios perform many functions in higher education at the institutional and student levels. An interest in e-portfolios has exploded because, compared to traditional portfolios, they provide an easier and more comprehensive way to assess students' learning and have the potential to transform students' ability to combine and apply their knowledge.

Thus, e-Portfolios can be more than just storage devices of the learner's best work or any work when faculties develop a curriculum that integrates them across each student's academic career. It helps students explore and extend their learning in a developmental manner. Educational goals can be met with a developmental e-Portfolio system.

Advantages of adopting portfolio-based learning and assessment have been reported by researchers (e.g. Kim, 2004, O'Brien, 2006, Carmean & Christie, 2006, Hartnell-Young, 2006) and acknowledged by accreditation agencies. While portfolios are being adopted in various educational settings, the rapid advancement of digital and communication technologies are making it possible for the innovative design, implementations and applications of portfolio systems. Kim assumes that there are *"two emerging areas of educational research studies that are supporting, if not shaping, today's evolution of portfolio systems: 1) collaborative learning and qualitative assessment through concept-mapping, and 2) interactive visual interface-based multimedia storing and information retrieval"* (Kim, 2006, p. 44 – 45).

The role and importance of e-Portfolios as a relatively new tool in the educational process is emphasized by Colleen Carmean and Alice Christie who argue that *"e-Portfolio is a promising framework for enduring learning, self-assessment and construction of value across a student's educational path. Learners learn by doing, and by constructing knowledge, meaning, ownership, and value from the act of learning"* (Carmean & Christie, 2006, p. 40). When students know that their portfolio will reflect their growth or skill development over time, they are more focused. They become more rigorous self-evaluators and set goals for their own progress. They value where they have been and how much they have achieved. Because portfolios and e-portfolios include applications of content skills and chronicle students' progress and growth toward meeting curriculum goals and standards. Such a picture cannot be captured by a single test score. Within the portfolio process, students become active agents in the acquisition and exposition of their knowledge across the content area of the grade levels.

Kathleen O'Brien writes about many ways how e-portfolios might be used pointing out that *"of the many uses of e-Portfolios, optimizing and making available in an anytime, anywhere format faculty judgement and student self-assessment – critical elements of the teaching, learning, and assessment equation – are among the most useful, efficacious, and cost-effective purposes of these Web-enabled tools. Despite current and potential limitations, e-Portfolios configured to capture the content, process, and expert judgements of faculty assessors and the reflections of students across the boundaries of the disciplines and their learning experiences hold promise for a new era of teaching, student-directed learning, and curriculum development"* (O'Brien, 2006, p. 74).

In terms of types and uses of e-Portfolios there are many possibilities how to implement this tool into the studying programmes of schools and universities. Most of them are so called showcase portfolios in which students select evidence they believe demonstrates how they see specific learning outcomes, outcomes they themselves design rather than those the institution requires. As worthy and creative as these are, they are often supplements to the educational process, demonstrating student's way of understanding the issues, adding a new dimension to faculty pedagogical practice as well as student reflective practice.

It is important, for learners as well as teachers, to decide what type of portfolio they are planning to use in the educational institution, its organization, what the portfolio includes, e.g. student artifacts, feedback nature of content, delivery mode.

Video portfolios, for example, may contribute to the student's growing communication. They enable to see the development in case of student's skills because they contain samples of student's communication skills over a period of time. Faculties may also create a writing portfolio for each student that contains samples of each student's writing from the very beginning of a semester. As O'Brien argues "*selection of samples for the video and paper portfolio is guided by the educational philosophy of assessment – as – learning*" (O'Brien, 2006, p. 75 – 76). Students need to review their previous performances in a variety of disciplinary contexts and re-visit their self-assessment and faculty feedback, in order to optimize their learning process.

A balanced or comprehensive assessment system is developed when the portfolio includes three types of assessment in order to arrive at an accurate portrait of a student as a learner: knowledge, processes, and performances (Belgrad & Burke & Fogarty, 2008).

The first type of assessment that teachers can include on portfolios and e-portfolios consists of scores from traditional or standardized tests, which focus on mastery of students' knowledge of the content of curricula. Obviously, this type of assessment is necessary and appropriate.

The second type of assessment focuses on the processes the student uses to achieve the academic goals. Process assessment tend to provide formative feedback to students and teachers while students are learning concepts, knowledge, and skills. Belgrad & Burke & Fogarty say that "*because of this, rough drafts of writing or initial problem-solving strategies should be dated and should include student reflection on how the new piece has improved, and what new ideas, strategies, or concepts have been acquired*" (Belgrad & Burke & Fogarty, 2008, p. xviii).

The third assessment type focuses on student performances, i.e. student's ability to apply the knowledge, content, and skills they have learned become evident. Performances allow students to demonstrate that they are able to transform the knowledge and skills in the subjects studied into action.

When teachers design portfolio and e-portfolio processes that integrate these three types of assessment, they help meet the individual needs of the student and provide a more accurate evaluation picture of the student's strengths and weaknesses.

Moreover, e-portfolios may be used not only by pupils or students and their teachers at schools or universities, they might be useful in case of adults working in various organizations. Hartnell-Young argues that the focus should be on the lifelong learners' capacity to create and communicate with digital technologies while learning as well. She says that "*in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we talk of knowledge as the new currency, and knowledge building as the work to be done in learning organizations. While knowledge building is activity directed outward towards the creation of knowledge itself, learning is a personal consequence of this process, the aspect that is directed to enhancing individual abilities and dispositions and e Portfolios can support aspects of lifelong learning in the knowledge economy: engagement with technology, representations of identity, developing critical multiliteracies, and global and local mobility*" (Hartnell-Young, 2006, p. 125).

Marcoul-Burlinson from City University, London, also points out that the concept and the uses of electronic portfolios as pedagogical tools might be useful for adult learners, particularly in higher education, where it is part of the personal development plan (PDP) agenda on lifelong learning and widening participation. She assumes that "*the role of the e-Portfolio is to evidence learning in general and to provide a personal digital collection of information showcasing the learning process, experience, and achievements of a learner for career purposes and for personal development*" (Marcoul-Burlinson, 2006, p. 168 – 169).

Despite many promising features and power as a learning tool, e-portfolios have their drawbacks and concerns, perhaps even risks. One of challenges to be faced is the process of designing and implementing an e-Portfolio system that would be cost effective, user-friendly and accepted and used by faculty and students, by any user, in fact. The possible risky moments include the question of students' technological ability, but not only. The other and more important

question is that one which concerns designing an effective and comprehensible portfolio or e-portfolio that would consider the development stages of the student, to determine what skills they may need to develop before proceeding. Understanding that an effective portfolio process is one in which students are highly involved from the outset and that one which will enable the teacher to determine what knowledge, skills, and dispositions students need to possess or develop along the way.

### **The KEGA project “ePortfolio as Pedagogy Facilitating Integrative Learning”**

Today's Slovak university graduates are not up to the demands of big business. The requirements of companies for applicants are changing dynamically and it turns out that the education system cannot meet them to the necessary extent. Foreign languages, critical thinking and digital skills are a scarce commodity on the labour market. Slovakia is part of the global economy and the education system should prepare graduates primarily for adaptability on the labour market and the ability to learn for life. In addition to general knowledge, graduates already need soft and digital skills. The education system in Slovakia should prepare enough young people for the labour market who are sufficiently linguistically equipped with at least two foreign languages, have critical thinking, can present things clearly and intelligibly, are curious and can work together.

The University of Economics in Bratislava has a specific position among Slovak universities because every year it produces many graduates who are successful on the labour market. The majority of them is equipped with two foreign languages, but what seems to be a challenge for the future is the fact that they need better communication and presentation skills. The Department of English Language and the Department of Romance and Slavic Languages of the Faculty of Applied Languages at the University of Economics, want to develop students' soft and digital skills. Through case studies and professional texts, they want to focus on integrated skills in a foreign language (reading comprehension, listening comprehension, speaking, writing) as well as analytical and critical thinking, problem solving and cooperation between team members. The final output of each case study will be a written assignment, which students will add to their own e-portfolios.

The aim of the KEGA research project “e-Portfolio as Pedagogy Facilitating Integrative Learning” carried out at the University of Economics, Faculty of Applied Languages in cooperation with the Trnava University, Faculty of Education, is to find out to what extent an e-portfolio will affect students' writing skills and improve their performance. Written assignments will be regularly evaluated, students will be able to consult their shortcomings with their lecturers. Evaluations of all groups of students will be regularly monitored, compared and statistically processed.

The present KEGA project is focused on the development of integrated skills in English and Spanish language, by introducing an e-portfolio through the iSkills portfolio application, Mahara, Office 365 or Moodle. The research team will assess the standard of all student outputs. At the same time, it will examine how working on their own e-portfolio has motivated students to improve their written expression in English and Spanish. The results achieved will be verified through statistical methods. The output of the project will be a university textbook with the most common used genres that are essential to master in written communication. It will be designed for educators who teach a foreign language for specific purposes.

The project will take for three years (from 2023 to 2025) and during this period students will create their e-portfolios and work on their collections of assignments. The benefits of an e-portfolio will be explained to them and they will be familiarised with all the genres they should master in writing, because they will encounter and need them in practice. Throughout the whole period, they will communicate with their lecturers and improve their writing skills by means of various tasks completed during their semesters. Students will have the opportunity to present their e-portfolios and continue to create a professional e-portfolio in the future. Implementing e-

portfolios with students and evaluating individual tasks requires great courage and challenge for lecturers and therefore we believe that working on e-portfolios will be beneficial for both students and educators.

In many cases students are not familiar with e-Portfolios enough. Despite the fact they like new technologies and use them on the daily basis, they have little training or experience (if any) with electronic platforms used nowadays. According to their answers in the questionnaire at the beginning of the semester, only a few have heard about Moodle, none about Mahara, most of them said they had the experience with e-learning, but not with e-Portfolios. In terms of their skills, all of them expect to improve writing skills in the sphere of professional foreign language.

To sum it up, communication skills cannot be understood in isolation since they overlap and complement each other. The project is focused on the development of integrated skills, i.e. reading comprehension, listening comprehension, writing and speaking (dialogue, monologue) with an emphasis on the development of writing skills in English and Spanish. The main goal of the project is to find out to what extent an e-portfolio will affect students' writing skills and improve their performance. This goal is supposed to be reached by means of the following partial objectives - to create an e-portfolio, to develop digital skills, to modernise the educational process within the study of professional foreign languages and make it more interesting and beneficial for students, to develop writing skills within the period of two/three semesters, to present own e-portfolios, to elaborate a university textbook for lecturers who teach English and Spanish for Specific Purposes.

## Conclusion

The notion of a portfolio or e-portfolio as a systematic process of students' learning, self-assessment and reflection on what they know, as well as their better learning achievement, has gained increasing attention in recent years. It enables teachers to work with students at all levels, including universities, as they place their work into portfolios throughout the year. It enables students to see their growth, their development in the given field as they work with e-portfolios over a period of time. A portfolio gets students involved into a process of learning actively and leaves them with a product they can be proud of.

Teachers realize that portfolios demonstrate what students know and what they can do, how they grow. They also realize that they “*can gain a better understanding of a student's abilities and accomplishments by simply looking at the student's work, rather than the abstracted final grade*” (Niquida, 1993, p. 1). They also believe that portfolios complement paper-to-pencil tests as formative tools that measure academic skills and by means of portfolios and e-portfolios students are able to take ownership as they begin to compile their best work in writing. While it is true that portfolios will take more time and more planning, teachers recognize that the payoff in terms of student motivation, involvement in self-assessment, goal-setting, and overall achievement is worth it.

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