

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF USING E-PORTFOLIOS IN DEVELOPING WRITING SKILLS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH

POSTOJE ŠTUDENTOV K VYUŽÍVANIU E-PORTFÓLIA
V ROZVOJI ZRUČNOSTI PÍSANIA V HOSPODÁRSKEJ ANGLIČTINE

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Abstract: This study investigates students' views on using e-portfolios to develop writing skills in advanced business English courses at Bratislava University of Economics and Business. The research highlights the effectiveness of e-portfolios as a learning tool, the challenges students faced with vocabulary and style, and the role of AI tools such as ChatGPT in supporting writing tasks. The findings show that while students found e-portfolios enriching, many were uncertain about their practical application in professional contexts. The study also reveals a need to integrate AI literacy into the curriculum and align academic assignments with real-world demands.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, business English, e-portfolio, language skills, questionnaire. writing.

Abstrakt: Predkladaná štúdia skúma názory študentov na používanie e-portfólií v rozvoji písania v kurzoch obchodnej angličtiny pre pokročilých na Ekonomickej univerzite v Bratislave. Výskum poukazuje na efektivitu e-portfólií ako učebného nástroja, na problémy, ktorým študenti čelili v súvislosti so slovnou zásobou a štýlom, a na úlohu nástrojov umelej inteligencie, ako je ChatGPT, pri podpore úloh písania. Z výsledkov vyplýva, že hoci študenti považovali e-portfóliá za obohacujúce, mnohí si neboli istí ich praktickým využitím v profesionálnom kontexte. Štúdia tiež odhaľuje potrebu začleniť gramotnosť v oblasti umelej inteligencie do kurikula a zosúladiť akademické úlohy s požiadavkami praxe.

Kľúčové slová: umelá inteligencia, hospodárska angličtina, e-portfólio, jazykové zručnosti, MS Teams, dotazník, písanie.

Introduction

The importance of language proficiency is recognised by tertiary education level institutions offering foreign language courses, with English being the most popular choice. These courses aim to provide students with the necessary skills required for effective communication in academic and professional settings, which cover the development of all four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing, together with the improvement of grammar and vocabulary focused on the specific requirements of business and economics.

Among the four language skills, the importance of written communication is widely recognised in both academic and professional business contexts. Nevertheless,

despite its critical role, writing skills are often neglected due to various reasons, one of them being the lack of contact hours in teaching business English at colleges and universities. In response to these challenges, the Faculty of Applied Languages at Bratislava University of Economics and Business together with the Faculty of Education at Trnava University introduced a KEGA research project 'e-Portfolio as Pedagogy Facilitating Integrative Learning' (012EU-4/2023) to their intermediate and advanced business English and Spanish courses. The e-portfolio is perceived as an innovative tool for both development and assessment of writing skills as highlighted by Rusiňáková (2023).

The primary objective of incorporating e-portfolios into business English and Spanish courses was to provide students with an efficient instrument to enhance their writing skills. However, this initiative has also unveiled potential avenues for further research. These include the assessment and self-assessment of writing (Rusiňáková, 2023) and research into identification of artificial intelligence (AI) by students and its influence on the assessment of written assignments (Hrdličková, 2024). Both these research strands provide insight from teachers' points of view. As a result, it is also necessary to explore students' perceptions of using e-portfolios in their business English courses, which is the main aim of the present article.

Literature review

With the advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT), e-portfolios have become increasingly used in various domains, including the learning and teaching of foreign languages. Before exploring the application of e-portfolios in tertiary education institutions, it is essential to define the term 'e-portfolio' and examine its usage at the undergraduate level.

One of the most widely accepted definitions of e-portfolios was proposed by Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005, p.1), who defined it as follows: *"An e-portfolio is a digitized collection of artifacts including demonstrations, resources, and accomplishments that represent an individual, group, or institution."* The authors further noted that *"e-portfolios encourage personal reflection and often involve the exchange of ideas and feedback"* (Ibid.). The authors then delineated three distinctive categories of e-portfolios: student, teaching, and institutional e-portfolios (Lorenzo – Ittelson, 2005). The present paper focuses on the first type – student e-portfolios.

Abrami and Barrett (2005) highlighted that *"[a]n eportfolio is a digital container capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, video and sound. Eportfolio may also be software tools not only because they organize content but also because they are designed to support a variety of pedagogical processes and assessment purposes."* Nevertheless, there has been a shift in focus from perceiving e-portfolios as mere 'containers' or 'collections' to acknowledging their efficacy in facilitating teaching and in particular self-learning.

There is a consensus among researchers and teaching practitioners that e-portfolios are of significant importance in the development of writing skills at undergraduate level by enhancing motivation (Aygün – Aydin, 2016), engagement (Fasa, 2023), facilitating self-regulated learning (Karami et al., 2019), and the provision

of a structured platform for feedback and reflection (Fasa, 2023, Karami et al., 2019, Thang et al., 2012; Shon, 2011). These digital tools enable students to methodically collect and exhibit their writing tasks, which can result in enhanced writing proficiency and engagement in the writing process. Simultaneously, e-portfolios proved to be an effective assessment tool (Ngui et al., 2022).

Research on students' perceptions of e-portfolios shows that this instrument is mostly viewed positively, especially in the areas of self-reflection and growth (Rani-Nissa, 2025), increased motivation, self-efficacy, effective task completion and improved English language skills (Muin et al., 2021). In other studies, students also valued the individual feedback they received from teachers, which improved their cognitive writing skills and allowed them to monitor their progress (Janwarini et al., 2023). Students also appreciated the development of critical and creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and teamwork, so e-portfolios enhanced their overall learning experience during online courses (Zunaidah, 2022) and improved students' confidence in their ESP competence (Todorova-Ruskova, 2023).

In addition to the advantages of employing e-portfolios, students and educators identified certain disadvantages. The most significant challenge cited by students and educators alike was the heavy workload, which led to rushed development and infrequent updating of e-portfolios (Hsieh et al., 2015). Some students reported negative perceptions of time constraints and encountered technical difficulties when working with the portfolios (Rani – Nissa, 2025; Součková, 2024), or found the work less meaningful (Muin et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the overall attitude of students regarding the work with e-portfolios was predominantly positive.

Methods

The e-portfolio was introduced as a learning tool in two business English courses for advanced students at Bratislava University of Economics and Business during the 2023/2024 academic year. In the winter semester, 18 students from the Faculty of International Relations created e-portfolios comprising four documents aligned with study materials from *Business Partner C1* (Dubicka et al., 2020). These documents included minutes of a meeting, a summary of a text, a formal email, and an informal email. They were assigned a further series of tasks to be completed as part of their portfolios. These tasks included a curriculum vitae, a covering letter, a report, and an application for a grant to study abroad.

Based on the results of an initial questionnaire assessing students' language levels in English and, most importantly, their familiarity with online learning tools such as Moodle and e-portfolios, specifically Mahara, the responses indicated students' prior lack of experience with these technologies (Hrdličková, 2023). As a result, Microsoft Teams was chosen as the platform for storing completed tasks as e-portfolios. This platform was widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring that students had already been familiar with its functionality. Each task was then corrected and evaluated by the instructor, who provided feedback to the students. In addition to conducting a statistical analysis of the results, it became evident that an exploration of students' attitudes towards e-portfolios was necessary. To this end, a questionnaire

comprising 20 questions was administered to all the students participating in the project via MS Forms and MS Teams in December 2024. The questionnaire was designed to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the overall perception among students of the use of e-portfolios in undergraduate business English courses?

RQ2: What challenges were most significant for students when creating their e-portfolios?

RQ3: What role did artificial intelligence (AI) play in completing the tasks?

Results and discussion

The survey was distributed to all 38 students participating in the study during both semesters of the 2023/2024 academic year. Of these, 21 provided responses, resulting in a response rate of 55.3%. While this percentage might not appear to be particularly high, it is important to note that the distribution of the questionnaire occurred after the completion of the business English courses by the students. It is also worth noting that 13 students (62%) who participated in the project during the winter semester responded to the questionnaire, whereas only 8 students (38%) from the summer semester provided responses.

The first part focused on identifying which language skill posed the greatest challenge in developing writing proficiency: vocabulary, style, spelling, grammar, punctuation, or writing speed. The results, as illustrated in Figure 1, revealed that vocabulary was perceived as the most challenging aspect of writing, followed by style. Grammar elicited mixed feedback, as the majority of students viewed it as moderately challenging, while some found it relatively easy or very difficult. On the other hand, spelling and punctuation were generally regarded as easier to manage, with fewer students reporting difficulties in these areas. Writing speed presented varied challenges, with some students struggling while others found it less problematic. These findings offer valuable insights for tailoring teaching strategies focusing on vocabulary and style in business English courses.

Following the previous question, students were asked to rate the complexity of the genres included in the assignments, employing a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 denoted the most challenging genre and 4 indicated the least demanding one. As shown in Table 1, respondents indicated that they found the minutes of a meeting to be the most challenging assignment during the winter semester, and the covering letter during the summer semester. Conversely, an informal e-mail and a curriculum vitae were perceived as the least challenging.

The next section of the questionnaire focused on students' perceptions of using e-portfolios in their business English courses and in the future in their professional lives. A total of 42.9% of respondents agreed that creating their own e-portfolios was an enriching experience. However, only 4.8% of respondents indicated that they would be willing to use e-portfolios in the future. All 21 respondents asserted that they did not encounter any difficulties when working with e-portfolios. A significant proportion of the students, 52%, expressed a preference for the MS Teams platform for portfolio creation, while 48% indicated uncertainty regarding their choice. Overall, 71% of all

students were unsure if they could use the e-portfolio when looking for a job, 19% said they would not use it, and only 10% said they would, explaining that “it’s easy and you have everything in one place”. When asked if they would continue to use a professional e-portfolio in their future career after graduation, the responses were very similar to the previous question: 67% chose the option *I don’t know*, 10% chose *yes* and 24% chose *no*. Respondents explained the positive answers by saying that they wanted to complete their e-portfolio and that they might need it in their future job.

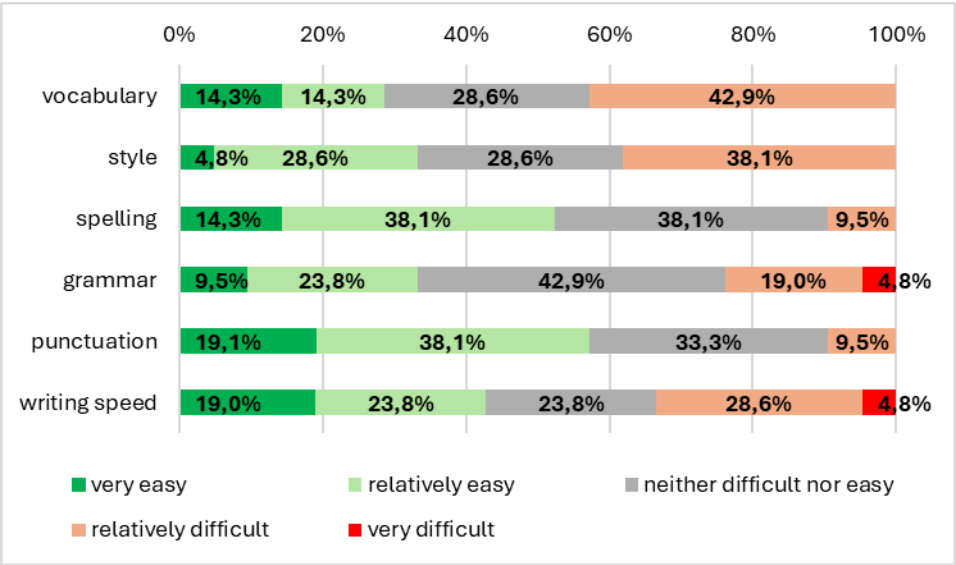


Figure 1 Difficulty levels in developing writing skills

winter	1	2	3	4	summer	1	2	3	4
minutes	6	4	1	2	covering letter	4	8	8	1
	46%	31%	8%	15%		19%	38%	38%	5%
summary	2	4	5	2	application	8	2	3	8
	15%	31%	38%	15%		38%	10%	14%	38%
formal e-mail	1	4	7	1	report	5	4	7	5
	8%	31%	54%	8%		24%	19%	33%	24%
informal e-mail	4	1	0	8	curriculum vitae	4	7	3	7
	31%	8%	0%	62%		19%	33%	14%	33%

Table 1 Difficulty levels of individual genres

The responses to the final question regarding the implementation of e-portfolios at work, for instance, using them for clients in companies, followed the same tendency as observed in the two preceding questions: 71% of respondents expressed uncertainty, 24% responded in the negative, and a mere 5% expressed a favourable view, articulating their stance as follows: “*It is a great way to practise writing skills,*

which also help develop reasoning and speaking skills, as in organising thoughts, structuring arguments, not being boring and using critical thinking skill to for example avoid logical fallacies.”

The final section of the survey examined the use of AI by students in completing academic assignments. This issue emerged during the course of the project, coinciding with the public release of AI tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot. Slightly more than half of the respondents reported utilizing AI in their assignments, as illustrated in Figure 2. Among the eleven students surveyed, nine specified that they used ChatGPT, while one student also employed deeppl.com and another used Grammarly.

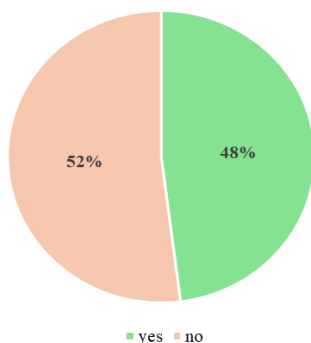


Figure 2 Proportion of students using AI

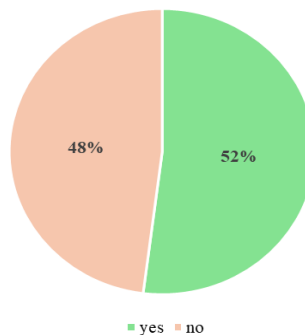


Figure 3 Perceived usefulness of AI

There is a notable disparity between the ten students who used AI tools and the eleven students who perceived these tools as beneficial for completing assigned tasks, as shown in Figures 2 and 3. Among the reasons for finding AI tools useful, the vast majority of students said that AI gave them inspiration about the content and style of the assigned text, as well as helping them with translation, vocabulary, and grammar. When students were asked which AI tools they would incorporate into teaching and learning to enhance the writing process and improve the overall quality of written work, most expressed uncertainty. Among the suggestions provided, some mentioned ChatGPT (explicitly stating it should not be used to copy AI-generated texts), Grammarly, Copilot, and online dictionaries. Additionally, they suggested that these tools could be utilised to provide feedback and support individual study. The most comprehensive and intriguing response with an interesting twist at the end was offered by one student, which is presented in full below: *“I think that it really does not matter what platform is chosen, however, it should ideally be something widely recognised, established and proven (LLaMA, ChatGPT, Gemini etc.). It should not be a wrapper of a LLM. It should be demonstrated to pupils why the results of writing from such LLM are easily recognisable and what makes their writing/text dubious. It should also be demonstrated as an useful tool to brainstorm, help with structure of an essay, for asking questions regarding vocabulary, grammar or synonyms and, to some extent, proof reading. With some of the models online search functionalities, with cautious approach, it can also be used to find ideas and facts surrounding the given topic, however, explaining what hallucinations are is also crucial. (No, in case you are wondering, this*

was not AI generated text :))”. It should be noted that the errors that occurred in the quoted text have been intentionally maintained to serve as evidence that the response was not generated by AI.

Stemming from the analysis of the survey, the answers to the research questions are as follows: **RQ1:** The responses to this question were found to be mixed. Students generally found creating e-portfolios to be an enriching experience but were uncertain about their practical benefits beyond the classroom, especially in their future careers. **RQ2:** Students encountered no significant challenges in creating e-portfolios, though initial unfamiliarity with certain tools may have been a minor hurdle. They found vocabulary and style to be the most challenging writing skills. Among the genres, the minutes of a meeting and covering letters were reported as the most difficult. **RQ3:** AI tools were used by the majority of students to assist with tasks like content generation, vocabulary, and grammar. These tools were appreciated for inspiration and support in the writing process.

Conclusion

The findings of this study emphasise the potential of integrating e-portfolios into English for specific academic purposes courses as a learning tool to enhance writing proficiency and familiarise students with digital platforms. Nevertheless, the students' uncertainty regarding the practical application of e-portfolios in their future careers suggests a need for adjustments to better explain the connection of academic assignments with professional contexts. To address these gaps, it is recommended to provide additional instruction on challenging areas such as vocabulary and style, and to introduce students to specific applications of e-portfolios in business.

In addition, as AI tools such as ChatGPT become increasingly widespread in academic and professional settings, educators should consider incorporating AI literacy into the curriculum. This could include the responsible and ethical use of AI, focusing on its role as a supplementary tool for generating ideas, improving vocabulary, and refining grammar, especially in foreign language courses. Adopting these approaches would not only help students with developing their foreign language skills but also equip them with digital competencies for the modern workplace.

Addressing the limitations of this study is essential for interpreting the findings. Firstly, the survey response rate was approximately 50%, with most respondents coming from the winter semester. This imbalance may reduce the representativeness of the results. Secondly, since the study focused solely on advanced business English students at Bratislava University of Economics and Business, the findings may not be generalizable to other courses or institutions. Comparing these results with data from similar studies, such as those conducted at the Faculty of Education at Trnava University, could provide valuable insights. Thirdly, the timing of the survey, administered after course completion, may have influenced how students remembered and shared their experiences. Lastly, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of subjective bias, and it would be worthwhile to compare this with an objective assessment of the writing tasks.

The objective of this study was to contribute to the discussion on the potential of e-portfolios and AI to influence learning and professional development. By continually adapting teaching methods and embracing innovation, educators can help bridge the gap between academic learning and the skills needed in today's technology-driven world.

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