

## Portfolio Assessment in English Language Teaching (ELT)

### პორტფოლიოს გამოყენებით შეფასება ინგლისური ენის სწავლებისას

Ramazan GÖÇTÜ\*  
რამაზან გოჩთუ\*

#### Abstract

This article is written to inform people especially in the field of education about the different kinds of assessment. Today there is much talk about the necessity to test the skills the student will need in real-life tasks. Doing multiple choice and essay-writing is not what we do in real life, thus authentic assessment, otherwise called performance assessment, is recommended for bringing assessment closer to real-life tasks. An example of an authentic language assessment activity may be cooking based on the recipe read or heard. Authentic assessment through portfolio is very new and practically has very little been implemented at EFL classes in Georgia yet. With the advent of various new and innovative methods in education, alternative assessment methods will be part of these improvements.

**Keywords:** portfolio, assessment, authentic, alternative / performance assessment

#### რეზიუმე

სტატიის მიზანია განათლების სისტემით დაინტერესებულ პირთა ინფორმირება შეფასების ახალი მეთოდების შესახებ. დღესდღეობით ბევრს საუბრობენ იმ ტიპის შეფასების აუცილებლობაზე, რომელიც გაზომავს მოსწავლეების ისეთ უნარ-ჩვევებს, რომლებიც მათ ცხოვრებისეული ამოცანების შესრულებისას გამოადგებათ. მრავალი არჩევნის ტესტების კეთება და ესეს წერა არ არის ის, რისი გაკეთებაც მოუწევთ მოსწავლეებს რეალურ ცხოვრებაში. ამიტომ რეკომენდირებულია ავთენტური/ალტერნატიული შეფასება, რომელსაც ასევე უწოდებენ აღსრულების შეფასებას, შეფასებისა და ცხოვრებისეული ამოცანების დაახლოების მიზნით. ენობრივი უნარ-ჩვევების ავთენტური შეფასების მაგალითია მოსმენილ ან წაკითხულ რეცეპტზე დაყრდნობით კერძის მომზადება. ავთენტური შეფასება პორტფოლიოს გამოყენებით ჯერჯერობით ახალი და ნაკლებად გავრცელებულია საქართველოში ინგლისური ენის სწავლებისას. განათლებაში ინოვაციური მეთოდების დანერგვა გააუმჯობესებს სწავლების პროცესს, რაშიც თავის როლს შეასრულებს შეფასების ალტერნატიული მეთოდების შემოტანა.

**საკვანძო სიტყვები:** პორტფოლიო, შეფასება, ავთენტური, ალტერნატიული / აღსრულების შეფასება

#### Introduction

Portfolios have been used for decades in many different fields, such as art, architecture and cinematography. The practice of using portfolios in job searches appears to be gaining popularity as well (Costantino & Lorenzo, 2002; Wolf & Dietz, 1998; Wyatt & Looper, 2004).

In education, portfolios were first unveiled as an assessment method for determining student learning in K–12 classes at US schools. More recently, US universities have implemented electronic portfolios in an effort to document student learning for accreditation purposes (Wetzel & Strudler, 2006). Additionally, many institutions of higher education deem the portfolio's purpose to be twofold, adding the second use as an employment portfolio, also commonly referred to as a “selection” portfolio or an “inter-

view” portfolio (Theel & Tallerico, 2004).

Portfolio assessment in education is not very new in the United States of America and Europe, but quite new in Georgia. It is a great misfortune that this innovative form of assessment has had very limited application in EFL teaching in Georgia yet. Traditional assessment techniques continue to occupy an important place in the student assessment due to lack of professional development as well as conservative attitude of some teachers, which has apparently restricted pedagogical reform in EFL teaching in Georgia. As the reform movements continue to sweep across the educational landscape in Georgia, educators and practitioners are exploring and attempting new and innovative practices in the classroom. Of all non-traditional approaches to instruction and assessment, portfolio use seems to show the greatest promise in enhancing diverse dimen-

\*Ramazan GÖÇTÜ IBSU Ph.D. Student; Private Demirel College teacher, Tbilisi, Georgia

sions of learning and developing multiple intelligences as well as promoting learner autonomy. Teachers who want to better understand what is portfolio, how it can be used, etc. can use the link <http://elp-implementation.ecml.at/>

## Literature Review

### History

As Knapper (1995) has described, the recent origins of the portfolio can be traced back to the work of a committee of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which was concerned in the 1970s with the undue reliance on student ratings for the evaluation of teaching. This group called for a more broadly based approach to evaluation that would use multiple sources of information and place responsibility for compiling the documentation on the individual faculty member rather than a remote administrator. The committee chair, Bruce Shore, first articulated the idea that faculty members should build their own case for teaching effectiveness - a "portfolio of evidence" to demonstrate competence (Shore, 1975, p. 8). Shortly afterward, the committee set about preparing its Guide to the Teaching Dossier, which was first published in 1980; it appeared in a second edition in 1986 and has been widely emulated and excerpted since then in a variety of publications all over the world (Shore et al, 1980, 1986).

Portfolio assessment has been used extensively since mid '80s in education. The idea of using portfolios as an instrument in performance-based assessment is not new. From past to present, especially painters, artists, writers, models and photographers have exhibited their vocational and acquired skills through portfolios (Zollman & Jones, 1994). In recent years, portfolios have been utilized for the same purposes, as well as an assessment instrument and as part of activities to improve students' foreign language skills.

### Definition

In education a portfolio stands for a kind of student-centered assessment. For some teachers, portfolio is part of an alternative assessment can either include students' achievements or simply document their best work. For other teachers, the portfolio documents the students' learning process, and still others use it as a means of promoting learner reflection (Nunes, 2004). Hamp-Lyons (1994) labels portfolio an excellent pedagogical tool interweaving assessment with instruction: it provides chances to integrate more forms of evaluation into teaching, such that evaluation will become "a less threatening and more supportive activity" to learners. Moya and O'Malley (1994) claim portfolios can be used as a systematic assessment tool in instructional planning and student evaluation.

Matching assessment to teaching and supplying a profile of students' learning and growth in multiple domains or skills, portfolios are thus recommended as an alternative to standardized testing and all problems found with such testing.

Firstly, portfolio has been started to be used as alternative measure and assessment tool, then portfolio has been started to be used as a teaching material and method (Wolf, 1999; Kaptan & Korkmaz, 2000). According to Kaptan and Korkmaz (2000), portfolio is the operation of recording the success and performance of the student during the learning process. Thus, with the portfolio, answers can be received to the questions such as how did the student think?, what did he learn?, what way did he follow while learning?, which difficulties did he face while learning?, how did he ask questions?, how did he analyze?, how did he configure the knowledge?, how did he communicate with the other people? So, to use portfolio which is based on cognitive and constructivist learning theory can be efficacious in our educational system as a teaching method.

A writing portfolio, for example, is a purposeful collection of student texts that demonstrates students' effort, progress, and achievement in writing over a period of time (Weigle, 2007). Portfolio reveals a clear picture of the student's growth and development.

### Types of portfolios

According to Columba & Dolgos (1995), there are basically three types of portfolios to consider for classroom use.

**Showcase:** This type of portfolio focuses on the student's best and most representative work. This type of portfolio is similar to an artist's portfolio where a variety of work is selected to reflect breadth of talent. Therefore, in this portfolio the student selects what he or she thinks is representative work. This folder is most often seen at open houses and parent visitations (Columba & Dolgos, 1995, p. 174-175).

**Teacher-Student Portfolio:** This type of portfolio is often called the "working portfolio" or a "working folder". This is an interactive teacher-student portfolio that aids in communication between teacher and student. The teacher and student conference to add or delete within the content of the show-case portfolio (Columba & Dolgos, 1995, p. 175).

**Teacher Alternative Assessment Portfolio:** All the items in this type of portfolio are scored, rated, ranked, or evaluated. Teachers can keep individual student portfolios that are solely for the teacher's use as an assessment tool. This is a focused type of portfolio and is a model of the holistic approach to assessment (Columba & Dolgos, 1995, p. 175).

In Table 1 I summed up the advantages and the disadvantages of portfolio assessment.

**Table 2:** *English Language Teachers' awareness of portfolio assessment method*

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Promotes student self-assessment</li> <li>✓ Promotes collaborative assessment</li> <li>✓ Enhances student motivation</li> <li>✓ Systematic assessment is ongoing</li> <li>✓ Focuses on improvement, not on comparison with others</li> <li>✓ Focuses on students' strength</li> <li>✓ Assessment process is individualized</li> <li>✓ Allows demonstration of unique accomplishments</li> <li>✓ Provides concrete examples for parent conferences</li> <li>✓ Products can be used for individualized teacher diagnosis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Scoring difficulty may lead to low reliability</li> <li>➤ Teacher training is needed to apply it</li> <li>➤ Time consuming to develop criteria, score and meet with students</li> <li>➤ Students may not make good selections of which materials to include</li> <li>➤ Sampling of student products may lead to weak generalization</li> <li>➤ Parents may find portfolio difficult to understand</li> </ul>

The table shows that there are some disadvantages of using portfolio assessment in English classes. In order to cope with this issue, the following kinds of activities can be carried out by teachers:

1. Reading related literature
2. Reflection in, on, and for action
3. Workshops and seminars
4. Frequent dialogues with research partners about problems, issues, and solutions
5. Sharing with colleagues and administrators (principal and dean) need for additional strategies and procedures to assess student learning and the misuse of test scores
6. Inviting interested teachers for classroom observation and idea exchange
7. Organizing school-based study group for English teachers

### Research

In order to obtain information about awareness of Georgian English teachers on portfolio assessment we held a questionnaire. The purpose of administering the questionnaire survey was to find out whether portfolio assessment was used by high school teachers and how it was used, as

well as teachers' attitudes toward portfolio assessment. The questionnaire comprised 8 questions.

#### 1. Do you know what is portfolio assessment?

Yes / No / Not sure

#### 2. If your answer is yes / not sure :

##### Choose the definition you think is most appropriate:

a. Portfolios are systematic, purposeful, and meaningful collections of students' works in one or more subject areas. Portfolio collections may include input by teachers, parents, peers, and school administrators.

b. Portfolio assessment is formal and often standardized type of assessment.

c. requires students to make a decision and find out which of two potential responses is true.

#### 3. Have you ever used portfolio assessment?

Yes, often / yes, but seldom/ No

#### 4. If yes, how did you like it?

1. Absolutely disliked

2. Liked more or less
3. Certainly liked

**5. If your answer to question 3 is yes, how did students like it?**

1. Very much
2. More or less
3. Totally disliked

**6. Why did you like it?**

- a. Creative
- b. Motivating
- c. Stimulate to study
- d. Imaginative
- e. Other

**7. If your answer ‘no’ why did not you like it?**

- a. difficult to assess
- b. time consuming
- c. difficult to collect information and documents
- d. Other

**8. Which way of assessment do you prefer?**

- a. traditional ( oral answers, written essays, etc.)
- b. Testing
- c. Performance assessment ( including portfolio)

Teachers answered the 8 research questions through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was conducted to 100

English teachers who are both from Tbilisi and districts of Georgia. While preparing the questions, we used the definition of portfolio assessment in this research.

The results are presented in the below table:

We can see that many teachers are unaware or not well informed of portfolio as an assessment tool in EFL (only 27% said they knew well what it is). What is interesting that a few teachers who said they knew what it is chose, however, a wrong definition, while some who said they didn't know what it is (probably, by exclusion method) chose the correct definition, which shows that reliability of results certainly isn't 100%. Some who are aware, however, do not apply it in practice, and even some who apply it (60%), are not satisfied (25% of those who have used it). Teachers who do not apply portfolio say it is difficult to assess (17% of those who answered “no”), time consuming (45%) and it is difficult to collect information (38%). Still, the results of the questionnaire are inspiring enough as teachers who like portfolio, find it creative, motivating, stimulating and imaginative – all features that traditional assessment lacks so much. Also 37% of respondents answered that they prefer a mixed form of assessment (opinion also shared by us). All this proves that spreading portfolio as assessment method requires time and effort of its proponents.

**Conclusions and recommendations**

Portfolio assessment provides a more authentic assess-

*Table 2. English Language Teachers' awareness of portfolio assessment method*

Question	Answer	Percentage
1	Yes	27
	No	13
	Not sure	60
2	A (correct definition)	64
	B (totally incorrect definition)	27
	C (similar to correct definition)	9
3	Yes, often	14
	Yes, but seldom	46
	No	40
4	Certainly liked	33% (out of 60 who answered “yes”)
	Liked more or less	41%
	Didn't like it	25%
5	They liked it very much	55% (out of 60 who answered “yes”)
	They liked more or less	45%
6	Creative	16%(out of 60 who answered “yes”)
	Motivating	56%
	Stimulate to study	35%
	Imaginative	50%
(the sum is more than 100, as choosing more than one answer was permitted)		
7	Difficult to assess	17% (out of 40 who answered “no”)
	Time consuming	45%
	Difficult to collect information	38%
8	Traditional	27%
	Testing	22%
	Performance ( including portfolio)	14%
	Combination	37%

ment of students' achievement and comprehensive views of students' performances in contexts, it encourages students to develop into independent and self-directed learners, and enhances communication among teacher and students. It can provide opportunities for learners to demonstrate his/her weaknesses and strengths and for teachers to direct their teaching. It also can encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning, and enhance student-teacher communication. In addition, portfolio assessment has a potential to demonstrate students' learning process and leaning product over time. As a result, portfolio gives detailed information about students' development in learning process to teacher, parents and students themselves. So, it can be recommended for assessment in EFL in Georgia than it is used today. Teacher awareness of what portfolio is needs to be increased. Teachers should be stimulated to use new assessment methods, including portfolio, especially taking into consideration students' positive attitude towards it. However, as it has both advantages and disadvantages, it will most probably be unreasonable and ineffective to use it as the only way of assessment.

## References

- Columba, L., and Dolgos, K.A. (1995). Portfolio assessment in mathematics. "Reading Improvement," 32 (3): 174-176
- Costantino, P., & De Lorenzo, M. (2002). Electronic portfolios: An option. In *Developing a Professional Teaching Portfolio* (pp. 47-55). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- De Fina, A. (1992). *Portfolio Assessment: Getting Started*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books
- Hamp-Lyons, L. (1994). Interweaving assessment and instruction in college ESL writing classes. *College ESL*, 4(1): 43-55
- Knapper, C. K., and Wilcox, S. (1998). *Preparing a Teaching Dossier*. Kingston, Canada: Queen's University Instructional Development Centre
- Moya, S. S., & Malley, J. (1994). A portfolio assessment model for ESL. *The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 13: 13-36
- Mullin, J.A. (1998). Portfolios: Purposeful Collections of Student Work. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 74 (summer): 74-87
- Nunes, A. (2004). Portfolios in the EFL classroom: disclosing an informed practice, *ELT Journal*, 58(4): 327-335
- Shore, B. M. (1975). "Moving beyond the Course Evaluation Questionnaire in Evaluating University Teaching." *CAUT Bulletin*, 23(4): 7-10
- Shore, B. M., and Associates. (1980). *The Teaching Dossier: A Guide to its Preparation and Use*. Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Teachers
- Shore, B. M., and Associates. (1986). *The Teaching Dossier: A Guide to its Preparation and Use*. (rev. ed.) Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Teachers
- Theel, R., & Tallero, M. (2004). Using portfolios for teacher hiring: Insights from school principals. *Action in Teacher Education*, 26(1): 26-33
- Using the European Language portfolio. (2011). Retrieved March 16, 2012 from <http://elp-implementation.ecml.at/>
- Weigle, S. (2007). Teaching writing teachers about assessment. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16/3: 194-209
- Wetzel, K. & Strudler, N. (2006). Costs and benefits of electronic portfolios in teacher education: student voices. *Journal of Computing in Teacher Education*, 22(3), 99-108
- Wolf, K. (1999). *Leading the professional portfolio process for change*. Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development
- Venn, J. J. (2000). *Assessing students with special needs* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill