

EFL Teachers and Students Raising Their Eyebrows Over Portfolio Assessment in Language Classrooms

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Abstract

The present paper reports on EFL teachers' and students' attitudes, challenges, and suggestions regarding portfolio assessment in language classes at a higher academic institution in Oman. The sample of the study includes six teachers and 108 students. Data was collected through two questionnaires. Analysis of the results reveals that teachers have low attitude levels, compared to students who have moderate attitude levels, towards using portfolios as an assessment tool for students' learning. Also, both teachers and students met various challenges in using portfolios and suggested different changes to the practice. These findings have several implications for language teachers, as well as language institutions, who should consider including all language skills in assessment portfolios. There should be periodic reviews of portfolio completion by the teacher and students. In addition, the findings of this paper suggest considerations for using e-portfolios.

Keywords: language assessment, alternative assessment, portfolio, EFL, Oman

1. Introduction

Language assessment is a very important part of any teaching situation, based upon which many decisions are made. Many argued that traditional forms of assessment, including achievement and standardized tests, have misjudged students' actual abilities and skills (Brown & Hudson, 2007; Cumming & Maxwell, 1999; Leon & Elias, 2016; Wiggins, 1990). Wiggins (1990) argued that traditional assessments are "not faithful" to the context of higher order thinking levels. Therefore, in recent years, there has been an increasing call for alternative assessments in the language classroom.

Alternative assessment is a set of additional measures of students' performances, such as portfolios, journals, observations, self- and peer-assessments, and reflective dialogues that teachers use to triangulate data about students' levels and proficiency (Brown, 2004). Genese and Upshur (1996) defined the portfolio as, "the purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates their efforts, progress and achievements in given areas". According to Wolf (1989), the purpose of the portfolio in language teaching is to include samples of oral and written work to demonstrate students' communicative competence in the target language (as cited in Shaaban, 2005).

Students at the University, in which the study was conducted, are required to have a minimum level of English language equal to IELTS band 5.5 before starting their degree programmes because all courses at the University are taught in English. The majority of students fail to achieve 5.5 to get admitted in the University, so they are enrolled in the foundation programme, which is a three-semester intensive programme. Students in the foundation programme study English language skills along with study skills, IT skills, and Mathematics. Across the three levels of the foundation English programme, portfolios are used as a part of the continuous assessment. This form of testing amounts for 5% of 60% of the total continuous assessment. Apart from compiling their worksheets and practice exercises in their portfolios, different portfolio tasks are performed in the class and are kept in the portfolios. Portfolio tasks differ from each level, but most of them focus on reading and writing. These portfolio tasks are administered at different intervals throughout the semester and are marked by the class teacher. Students are also required to build a vocabulary log of the words they study and encounter in their textbooks, which is another component of the portfolio.

Over the years, the use of portfolios in the language classroom has been widely debated, particularly in the EFL setting. There is a major concern that students might be disadvantaged when teachers are not fully aware of the usefulness, implementation, and evaluation of students' portfolios (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Teachers' and students' attitudes regarding the use of portfolio assessments are necessary to trace their usefulness and enhance their use (Bagheri & Ghaffari, 2017). Surveying university students over 4 years, Davis, Ponnampuruma, Ker, and Davis (2009) reported that students' performance and attitude levels increased over the years. When portfolio practice was introduced, Davis et al. (2009) concluded that students' performance and attitude levels were very low because they were not aware of the objectives of using portfolios. They recommended an urgent need for an induction session at the beginning of the semester, in which students are made aware of the purpose and objectives of the portfolio. Güney (2013) found that Turkish teachers are hesitant to use portfolio assessment, though it is a requirement in the Turkish curriculum, because of their low awareness of portfolio assessment. He recommended that Turkish teachers attend seminars and workshops on strategies and techniques to employ portfolio assessment in their teaching. Without clear objectives and systematic procedures, portfolios will not be very beneficial for students or teachers (Brown, 2004; J. Brown & Hudson, 2007; Moya & O'Malley, 1994). Throughout my teaching experience at the University, I have noted that teachers, as well as students, devalue the use of portfolio as an assessment tool. Questions have been raised by most teachers regarding the implementation and evaluation of students' portfolios.

The aim of this paper is to measure teachers' and students' attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool in the foundation programme at the University. In addition, it intends to explore the challenges faced by teachers and students when using portfolios as an assessment tool. It aims to gather suggestions from both teachers and students to improve the portfolio practice in the foundation programme at the University. This paper is an attempt at answering three related research questions:

- 1). What are teachers' and students' attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool in the foundation programme at the University?
- 2). What are the challenges faced by teachers and students in using portfolios as an assessment tool in the foundation programme at the University?
- 3). What are teachers' and students' suggestions for improving the portfolio practice in the foundation programme at the University?

This study aims to contribute to the field of language learning assessment in the following 3 ways: First, it will raise teachers' awareness and understanding of the potential use of portfolios as an assessment tool for language learning. Second, it will raise teachers' awareness about the multiple ways of evaluating students' portfolios. Third, it will provide some recommendations for improving the practice of portfolios in the foundation programme at the University specifically, as well as in foundation programmes in Oman, generally. It is hoped, the study will provide significant information for teachers, course designers, and stakeholders concerned with reforming the foundation programmes in the Omani context. The conclusions drawn from this study should be interpreted cautiously as it is limited to teachers and students of the foundation programme in one higher academic institution.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Characteristics and Benefits of Assessment Through Portfolios

In an attempt to summarize the advantages of portfolios, Brown and Hudson (2007) classified the advantages of portfolios into three main categories: strengthening students' learning, enhancing the teacher's role, and improving the teaching process. In terms of strengthening students' learning, they argued that portfolio assessments:

“(a) capitalize on work that would normally be done in the classroom anyway; (b) focus learners' attention on learning processes; (c) facilitate practice and revision processes; (d) help motivate students, if well-planned, because they present a series of meaningful and interesting activities; (e) increase students' involvement in the learning processes; (f) foster student-teacher and student-student collaboration; (g) provide means for establishing minimum standards for classroom work and progress; and (h) encourage students to learn the metalanguage necessary for students and teachers to talk about language growth.” (Brown & Hudson, 2007, p. 664).

Portfolio assessments can enhance the teachers' role by providing the teachers with a clear picture of their students' growth and help the teachers act as a coach or a facilitator (Brown & Hudson, 2007). In relation to improving the testing process, the researchers mentioned that they enhance teacher-student involvement,

provided teachers with observational opportunities of authentic language use, and permitted the assessment of multiple skills (Brown & Hudson, 2007). In his book, Brown (2004) synthesized the benefits of portfolio assessments from a number of sources. He came up with the following benefits of portfolios, stating that they:

- foster intrinsic motivation, responsibility, and ownership,
- individualize learning and celebrate the uniqueness of each student,
- provide tangible evidence of a student's work
- facilitate critical thinking, self-assessment, and revision processes,
- offer opportunities for collaborative work with peers,
- permit the assessment of multiple dimensions of language learning (Brown, 2004).

In order for portfolios to be very systematic assessment tools, Moya and O'Malley (1994) listed five important features of portfolios and their implications for ESL settings: comprehensive, pre-determined and systematic, informative, tailored, and authentic. In terms of comprehensiveness, portfolios should show the students' levels through comprehensive data collection and analysis, such as using both formal and informal assessment techniques, focusing on both processes and products of learning, including evidence of linguistic along with cognitive and metacognitive skills, and including academic and non-academic evidence. Pre-determined and systematic mean that a good portfolio is planned very well prior to its implementation. This planning, according to Moya and O'Malley (1994), should include "the purpose of using a portfolio, the contents of the portfolio, data collection schedule, and student performance criteria" (p. 15). The third feature, informative, means that the portfolio should be meaningful for both teachers and students. The portfolio should be tailored in the sense that it should be "tailored to the purpose for which it will be used, to classroom goals and objectives and to individual student assessment needs" (Moya & O'Malley, 1994, p. 15). Finally, the portfolio should reflect authentic tasks that depict real-life tasks (Moya & O'Malley, 1994). Though the characteristics and the benefits overlap, they provided a very solid and comprehensive base to guide the planning and implementation of a good portfolio practice to support students' learning.

2.2 Portfolios in ESL/EFL Classroom

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the effectiveness of portfolio assessment on students' language skills in ESL/EFL contexts. Using a quasi-experimental two-group research design, Obeiah and Bataineh (2016) found positive effects of portfolio use on students' writing skills. In their study, the experimental group was taught a writing process using the Hamp-Loyens model; they kept a portfolio in which they compiled planning outlines and drafts of their writing, whereas the control group students were not asked to use portfolios. Though Obeiah and Bataineh (2016) confirmed that using portfolios in writing can positively affect students' writing development, their study is limited to only 40 students. Another drawback of Obeiah and Bataineh's (2016) study is that they only included female students. Including male students might have shown contradictory results. Likewise, positive results of using portfolio assessments on students' English business writing were obtained by Yahya and Ismail (2015). Using a quasi-experimental research design, Yahya and Ismail (2015) found that portfolio assessment has a more positive effect on female students. Furthermore, in their experimental study, Uçara and Yazıcı (2016) (as cited in Bagheri & Ghaffari, 2017) used portfolio assessment to develop students' writing skills. Their experimental group was taught through portfolio assessment, whereas the control group was taught using conventional teaching methods. The result statistically signified that the writing performance was improved by the use of portfolios.

Although a lot of research findings revealed that portfolios have a positive effect on students' learning, some drawbacks were reported in the literature. Brown (2004) listed some factors that might lead to unsuccessful portfolio implementation, which are unclear objectives, no communication of guidelines to students, lack of availability for periodic review of portfolios, and no feedback given to students. In addition, Brown (2004) also stated that evaluating portfolios is time-consuming.

2.3 Teachers' Attitudes Towards Using Portfolios

Though a large body of research has focused on the effectiveness of using portfolios in the language classroom, there is a substantial amount of research on teachers' attitudes towards using portfolio assessments. In an attempt to gauge ESP teachers' attitudes towards portfolio assessments, Bagheri and Ghaffari (2017) used a survey research design to measure 42 ESP teachers from various higher education institutions. Their survey included items to measure teachers' perceptions on five main steps: planning stage, collecting documents and products, reflecting on the selected documents and products, revising and self-assessing the documents and products, and

utilizing the results of the portfolios. The results showed that teachers demonstrated a positive attitude towards using portfolio assessments in regard to their interest and in regard to the practicality and usefulness of portfolios. The same study reported that teachers perceived portfolio assessments negatively because it required a lot of time in terms of planning and assessing students' work.

Al-nouh, Taqi, and Abdul-kareem (2014) collected data from 335 EFL primary school teachers in Kuwait to measure their attitudes on the use of portfolio assessments. The study concluded that teachers had a medium attitude towards portfolio assessment. Similar to the findings of Bagheri and Ghaffari (2017), Al-nouh et al. (2014) reported that EFL primary teachers found portfolio assessments was time-consuming.

2.4 Students' Attitudes Towards Using Portfolios

Several studies were carried out to determine students' attitudes and opinions towards using portfolios. Davis, Ponnampuruma, Ker, and Davis (2009) measured and analysed medical students using a longitudinal survey design. Comparing the results over 4 years, the study concluded that students' attitudes towards using portfolios improved over the duration of the study. However, two interesting findings were worth considering. Davis et al. (2009) found that students perceived portfolios negatively because the process of compiling portfolio materials took them a lot of time and efforts that could negatively interfere with their learning process. They reported that students found the practice unclear when portfolios were first introduced; a need for students' induction regarding the purpose and objectives of using portfolios was therefore recommended in the study. What increases the research validity of Davis et al.'s (2009) study is the use of six different sources of evidence to evaluate the portfolios' assessment process: analysis of student results, observer documentation, examiner evaluation questionnaires, students evaluation questionnaires, verbal reports from student representatives, and external examiner reports.

Similar results were obtained by Alwraikat (2012), who investigated students' attitudes towards using portfolios in the College of Educational Sciences at the University of Jordan using survey methodology. He reported that students have positive attitudes towards using portfolios in terms of their awareness of portfolios, the works and activities compiled in the portfolios, and the advantages and disadvantages of using portfolios. The external validity of Alwraikat's (2012) study might be at threat because he only surveyed approximately 90 students out of the total population, which was reported to be 607 students.

3. Method

3.1 Sample

A sample of teachers teaching in the foundation program at the University, as well as a sample of students studying in the same programme, were drawn. The teachers' sample represented all the teachers (N= 6) who were teaching in the foundation programme at the time of the study. The level coordinators were excluded from the sample to maintain the objectivity of the research, since they oversee portfolio tasks and portfolio guidelines.

Table 1 summarises the demographic information of the teachers. Half of the sample had more than 10 years of teaching experience, with an average of 3 years of teaching in the foundation programme at the University. Almost all teachers had experience teaching the three levels in the foundation, apart from one teacher who only had the chance to teach level 1 and level 2. At the time of this study, 50% of the sample were teaching level 2.

Table 1. Teachers' sample demographic information

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	2	33.3
Female	4	66.7
Educational Qualification		
BA Degree	2	33.3
MA Degree	4	66.7
PhD Degree	0	0
Teaching Experience		
1 to 5 years	1	16.7

6 to 10 years	2	33.3
More than 10 years	3	50.0
Current Teaching Level		
Level 1	2	33.3
Level 2	3	50.0
Level 3	1	16.7
Total	6	100

The sample of the students consists of 108 students studying in levels two and three of the foundation programme. Since they had not yet finished level 1 at the time of the study, and their experience with portfolios was very low, level 1 students were excluded from the sample. Table 2 presents the demographic information of the students' sample. Female students composed a large portion (86.1%) of the sample, compared to male students who composed a small size (13.9%) of the sample. Due to the many classes of level two, 79% of the sample was made of level two students whereas level three students composed 20.4% of the total number of students in the sample. Similarly, the sample represents more full-time students.

Table 2. Students' sample demographic information

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	15	13.9
Female	93	86.1
Level		
Level Two	63	58.3
Level Three	45	41.7
Study Mode		
Full-Time	86	79.6
Part-Time	22	20.4
Total	108	100

3.2 Research Design

A survey research design was used in this study to understand teachers' and students' attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool at the University. This research design was very helpful to describe the attitudes and opinions of the population (Creswell, 2012). As Milles and Gay (2016) stressed, survey designs, "involves collecting data to test hypotheses or to answer questions about people's opinions on some problem or issue" (p. 210).

3.3 Research Instruments

3.3.1 Teachers' Questionnaire

Teachers' questionnaire included three main parts. The first part was designed to collect general demographic information of the sample, such as gender, qualification, teaching experience, and the level that was being taught at the time of the study. The second part of the questionnaire gathered teachers' attitudes and perceptions towards using portfolio as an assessment tool, using a five-item Likert scale. Three items of the questionnaire measured teachers' attitudes with consideration to the purpose and objectives of the portfolio. Eleven items measured the attitudes towards using portfolio assessments, mainly regarding the procedures of conducting portfolios as an assessment tool at the University. Fifteen items were designed to measure teachers' attitudes regarding the skills developed and promoted by the use of portfolios. To gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' challenges, and in order for them to voice their suggestions, the last part of the questionnaire had four open-ended questions. The research instrument was validated by the head of the foundation department at the

University, who was not part of the study sample. It was also reviewed by a language instructor at the University who was teaching post-foundation courses. The instrument was amended based on their comments and suggestions. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was found to be 0.886, as measured by Cronbach's alpha in SPSS.

3.3.2 Students' Questionnaire

Like the teachers' questionnaire, the students' version included three main parts. The first part aimed at collecting some demographic information, such as gender, mode of study, and the level of the foundation programme. Students, in the second part of the questionnaire, were asked to rate their degree of agreement to thirty items using a five-item Likert scale. It included items regarding the purpose and objectives of the portfolio, such as portfolio procedures, the skills developed using portfolios, and some general items. The third section of the questionnaire had four open-ended questions. Face and content of the questionnaire were checked by the same reviewers who reviewed the teacher's questionnaire. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was 0.883 as measured by Cronbach's alpha in SPSS.

3.4 Analysis Procedures

To provide in-depth answers to the research questions, two analysis methods were used to analyse the data. Simple descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to analyse teachers' and students' responses to the Likert-scale items, using SPSS. For the statistical analysis of teachers' and students' attitudes, the attitudes were categorized into 5 categories: very low attitude, low attitude, moderate attitude, high attitude, and very high attitude. Qualitative analysis methods (thematic coding and frequency counts) were used to analyse the qualitative data obtained through the open-ended questions in both teachers' and students' questionnaires.

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Teachers' Questionnaire

Thirty-one Likert scale items were used to measure the attitudes of teachers towards using portfolios as an assessment tool. To answer the first research question, the overall attitudes were categorised into five categories.

Teachers showed a low attitude level towards using portfolios as an assessment tool ($M=50.0$, $SD=0.638$).

Table 3 presents the overall attitudes of teachers toward using portfolios. The data revealed that half of the teachers' sampled had low perceptions of portfolios. Just two teachers (33.3%) showed a moderate attitude towards portfolio use in the foundation programme at the University.

Table 3. Teachers' overall attitudes towards using portfolio as an assessment tool (N=6)

Scale value		N	%
1.00-1.80	Very low attitude	1	16.7
1.81-2.61	Low attitude	3	50.0
2.62-3.40	Moderate attitude	2	33.3
3.41-4.21	High attitude	0	0
4.22- 5.02	Very high attitude	0	0

A further descriptive analysis was used to understand teachers' attitudes towards using portfolio as an assessment tool, regarding portfolio purpose and objectives, portfolio procedures, skills development, and overall attitude.

Table 4 shows teachers' responses to the questionnaire items regarding the purpose and objectives of using portfolios as an assessment tool. The data indicated that teachers demonstrated a moderate level of awareness regarding the purpose and rationale of using portfolios ($M=3.50$), as well as the goals and objectives of using portfolios ($M= 3.00$). Although their awareness of purpose and objectives was moderately good, teachers' responses to the third item revealed that they didn't communicate portfolio purposes and objectives clearly to their students ($M=2.50$).

Table 4. Teachers' responses to items regarding purpose and objectives (N=6)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
1. Clear purpose for using portfolios	3.50	High
2. Clear stated goals for using portfolios	3.00	Moderate
3. Objectives are communicated to students	2.50	Low

The overall responses to the items related to portfolio procedures indicated that teachers have a low attitude level ($M=2.37$) towards the procedures of using portfolios as an assessment tool.

Table 5 presents teachers' responses to items regarding portfolio procedures. Looking deeply at the data presented in the table below, teachers didn't provide students with good samples of portfolios ($M=2.50$). Also, teachers' responses indicated that there was no collaboration between students and teachers in terms of compiling portfolio materials ($M=1.67$).

Table 5. Teachers' responses to items regarding portfolio procedures (N=6)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
4. Students are provided with samples of good portfolios.	2.50	Low
5. Class time is dedicated to portfolios.	2.83	Moderate
21. Student-teacher collaboration in portfolio completion.	1.67	Very low
22. Student-student collaboration in portfolio completion.	2.00	Low
24. Students' strengths and weaknesses are diagnosed through portfolio.	2.33	Low
25. Portfolios are evaluated at different intervals.	3.00	Moderate
26. Clear evaluation forms and rubrics	2.67	Moderate
27. Students are provided feedback	2.17	Low
28. Reference for teachers on students' progression in the previous foundation level.	2.33	Low
29. A track of student's development and progression.	2.17	Low
30. Time consuming in marking	2.50	Low

In response to the items regarding skills development, most of those surveyed indicated a low attitude level towards using portfolios as an assessment tool ($M=2.28$).

Table 6 lists teachers' responses to the items related to skills development, ranking them from the highest to the lowest mean. Teachers believed that portfolios at the University could develop students' reading ($M=3.17$) and writing skills ($M=2.67$). Teachers perceived portfolios as an assessment tool as very low regarding its benefits in developing autonomy, self-assessment, and critical thinking skills.

Table 6. Teachers' responses to items regarding skills development (N=6)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
6. Developing reading skills	3.17	moderate
7. Developing writing skills	2.67	Moderate
9. Developing speaking skills	2.61	Low
11. Developing autonomy	2.60	Low
18. Developing creativity	2.50	Low
8. Developing listening skills	2.17	Low
13. Fostering sense of responsibility	2.17	Low
14. Fostering sense of ownership	2.17	Low

15. Promoting student-teacher interaction	2.17	Low
20. Developing peer-assessment skills	2.17	Low
16. Offering opportunities for collaborative work	2.00	Low
19. Developing self-assessment skills	2.00	Low
17. Developing critical thinking skills	1.83	Low
12. Helping students to become active learners	1.67	Very low

Of the teachers' sample, five teachers responded to the open-ended questions of the survey. Teachers were asked to state their perceptions of the portfolio practice in the foundation programme. Two tutors reported positive attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool. Most of the teachers who responded to this item reported negative attitudes towards using portfolios. One of them stated that portfolios are, "*a mixture of tasks like the other classroom quizzes*". Another teacher stated that a portfolio "*lacks control and objectives*". Overall, the results of the first open-ended item revealed that most teachers perceive portfolio use negatively, seeing portfolios as a set of various quizzes for students.

In response to the second open-ended item of the survey, about the benefits of using portfolios, a range of responses were elicited. Over half of those respondents reported that portfolios helped students organize their learning materials, which in turn helped them eventually in revising for their midterms and final exams. Out of the five teachers, one teacher reported that portfolio 'vocabulary tasks' helped students become independent learners. It was also reported by another teacher that portfolios showed the work of the students in memorizing vocabulary items through the vocabulary logs, one of the portfolio tasks.

Regarding the third open-ended item, which elicited the drawbacks of portfolios, all teachers mentioned that using portfolios as an assessment tool was very demanding and time-consuming. According to the surveyed teachers, the portfolio included too many tasks that negatively affected the teaching and learning time. Three teachers reported that the portfolio did not have very clear marking guidelines. One participant felt that the portfolio failed to motivate students to learn because students viewed portfolio tasks like classroom quizzes and exams. Three of the teachers suggested that the foundation programme should opt for an e-portfolio, arguing that an e-portfolio might enhance students' learning and motivate them to study. Two teachers expressed a suggestion regarding the inclusion of other skills, such as speaking and listening, which were not part of the portfolio assessment. Also, two teachers suggested having clear objectives and marking criteria for the portfolio.

Altogether, the qualitative results of the teachers' questionnaire indicated that teachers have a negative view of the portfolio practice in the foundation programme at the University. This was because they saw it like a set of quizzes and exams which lacked control and objectives. The results also provided important insights about the drawbacks of the portfolio, with 'time-consuming' being the most common drawback of the portfolios in the foundation programme at the University.

4.2 Results of the Students' Questionnaire

The results obtained showed that students demonstrated moderate attitude levels towards portfolio use at the University.

Table 7 displays the students' overall attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool. About 68 students (63%) had moderate attitudes towards using portfolios. Only 17 students (15.7%) displayed high attitude levels towards portfolio use.

Table 7. Students' overall attitudes towards using portfolio as an assessment tool (N=108)

Scale value		N	%
1.00-1.80	Very low attitude	4	3.7
1.81-2.61	Low attitude	19	17.6
2.62-3.40	Moderate attitude	68	63.0
3.41-4.21	High attitude	17	15.7
4.22- 5.02	Very high attitude	0	0

Table 8 presents students' responses to the questionnaire items related to the purpose and objectives of using portfolios. The data in the table below clearly showed that students had insufficient awareness of the purpose of using portfolios ($M=2.80$). Students also had very low attitudes toward using portfolios because their responses indicated that portfolio objectives were not explained to them ($M=2.68$).

Table 8. Students' responses to items regarding purpose and objectives (N=108)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
1. Clear purpose of using portfolios	2.80	Moderate
2. Objectives are explained and communicated to students	2.68	Moderate

Students' responses to the items related to the portfolio procedures indicated that students had moderate attitude levels ($M=2.71$) towards assessment portfolios.

Table 9 illustrates students' responses to the questionnaire's items related to portfolio procedures. The data in the table revealed that students were not provided with samples of good portfolios ($M=1.50$) and were not asked by their teachers to bring or refer to the portfolios they have compiled in the earlier level of the foundation programme ($M=1.63$). As demonstrated in Table 9, students reported that portfolios were not evaluated at different intervals throughout the semester ($M=2.82$), which negatively contributed to students' overall attitudes.

Table 9. Students' responses to items regarding portfolio procedures (N=108)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
3. Teacher provided samples of good portfolios.	1.50	Very low
4. Class time is dedicated to portfolios.	3.43	Moderate
19. Student-teacher collaboration in portfolio completion.	2.42	Low
20. Student-student collaboration in portfolio completion.	2.98	Moderate
24. Portfolios are evaluated at different intervals.	2.82	Moderate
25. Teacher explained the evaluation rubrics	2.82	Moderate
26. Students are provided feedback	2.83	Moderate
27. Students are asked to bring their previous portfolios	1.63	Very low
29. Portfolio work was time-consuming	1.50	Very low

Table 10 lists students' responses to the items related to the skills development, ranking the skills from the highest to the lowest mean. Fostering a sense of ownership, developing self-assessment skills, and developing reading and writing skills were among the skills with the highest mean ($M=3.45$), compared to creativity and critical thinking skills which were rated low by the students.

Table 10. Students' responses to items regarding skills development (N=108)

Item	<i>M</i>	Rank
13. Fostering a sense of ownership	3.52	High
18. Developing self-assessment skills	3.45	High
5. Developing reading skills	3.43	High
6. Developing writing skills	3.42	High
14. Promoting student-teacher interaction	3.39	Moderate
10. Helping students to become self-learner	3.33	Moderate
11. Helping students to become active learners	3.30	Moderate
12. Fostering a sense of responsibility	3.25	Moderate

15. Offering opportunities for collaborative work	3.18	Moderate
8. Developing speaking skills	3.13	Moderate
7. Developing listening skills	3.12	Moderate
23. Identifying strengths and weaknesses	2.71	Moderate
17. Developing creativity	2.43	Low
16. Developing critical thinking skills	2.41	Low

Out of 108 students who responded to the questionnaire, 63 subjects answered the open-ended items. Of the 63 students, some answered only one open-ended item. Simple qualitative statistics were used to analyse students' responses; they were coded and counted. The first item was intended to gather students' views on the benefits of using portfolios in the foundation programme at the University. Nine different benefits were identified.

Table 11 shows the benefits derived from students' responses to the first open-ended item. Most of the students (82.5%) reported that portfolios helped them to keep their papers, i.e. papers and worksheets received and practiced throughout the semester. Almost two-thirds of the participants (66.7%) wrote that they used portfolios to revise for their exams. Also, it was noted in the data that 27 students reported that the portfolio had a positive impact on developing vocabulary and spelling. Interestingly, 16 students (25.4%) reported that the portfolio had no benefits. Out of the 63 students, very few students reported that portfolios helped them to be responsible, to develop reading and writing skills, and to find their strengths and weakness.

Table 11. Students' responses to the first open-ended item regarding the benefits of portfolio (N=63)

Benefits	N	%
Keeping papers	52	82.5
Revising for exams	42	66.7
Developing vocabulary and spelling	27	42.9
No benefits	16	25.4
Keeping grammar papers form teacher	13	20.6
Being responsible	3	4.8
Developing reading skills	3	4.8
Developing writing skills	3	4.8
Finding weaknesses and strengths	2	3.2

Students mentioned some challenges that they have faced while using portfolios as an assessment tool in the foundation programme at the University. Nine different challenges were identified.

Table 13 presents the challenges that were identified from the students' responses. Most of those surveyed (66.7%) indicated that using portfolios was a very time-consuming task. Just over half of the respondents (55.6%) reported that there were a lot of tasks included in the portfolio. A small number of participants (27%) mentioned that the portfolio didn't cater for all the skills. Also, 6 students reported that the portfolio didn't include speaking and listening skills. Only one student indicted that the portfolio was once checked and seen by the teacher. Overall, the results of the second item indicated that the most common challenges for the students were the amount of time spent on portfolio tasks, the large quantity of portfolio tasks, and the unclear procedures for selecting and organizing the portfolio materials. Although it wasn't reported by many respondents, neglecting the different language skills in the portfolio should be considered.

Table 12. Students' responses to the second open-ended item regarding the drawbacks of portfolio (N=63)

Challenges	N	%
Time-consuming	42	66.7
A lot of tasks	35	55.6
Unclear organisation and selection process	18	28.6
Doesn't include all skills	17	27
Exam papers are not included	8	12.7
No use after the end of the semester	6	9.5
Doesn't include listening and speaking skills	6	9.5
Can be lost	2	3.2
Seen once by the teacher	1	1.6

Respondents provided some suggestions for improving the portfolio practice in the foundation programme at the University.

Table 13 summarises the suggestions of the students. Most of the respondents (68.3%) suggested that there is a need for teacher's feedback on the portfolios. About half of those surveyed (58.7%) suggested that some class time should be dedicated for portfolio completion. Interestingly, a good number of respondents (34.9%) indicated that the programme should consider using e-portfolios. Only 8 students suggested removing the vocabulary logs from the portfolio. Out of the 36 respondents, only one student suggested adding grammar tasks to the portfolios, and another student stated that there should be no marks assigned for portfolios.

Table 13. Students' responses to the third open-ended item regarding their suggestions for improving portfolio practice (N=63)

Suggestions	N	%
Requesting teacher's feedback	43	68.3
Scheduling class-time for portfolio	37	58.7
Having an e-portfolio	22	34.9
Keeping exam papers	14	22.2
Removing vocabulary logs	8	12.7
Keeping writing drafts	2	3.2
Adding grammar tasks	1	1.6
No marks for portfolio	1	1.6

4. Discussion

The study set out with the aim of measuring teachers' and students' attitudes towards using portfolios as an assessment tool, finding out the challenges they faced during implementation, and their suggestions for improving the use of portfolio assessment in the foundation programme at the University. Regarding teachers' attitudes, the current study found that teachers had a low attitude level towards the use of portfolios as an assessment tool of students' learning. This finding is consistent with Bagheri and Ghaffari, (2017) in which they found that ESP teachers viewed portfolios negatively in terms of planning issues, difficulty of assessing students' work, and the great amount of time required in the process of using portfolios. It seems possible that teachers in the foundation programme at the University have a low attitude level because the nature of the assessment is not crystal-clear for them. Another likely explanation may be due to the fact that portfolio assessment receives a very low portion of the continuous assessment marks.

Compared to teachers, the study found that students have a moderate attitude level towards using portfolio assessment. This finding further supports the findings reported in Davis et al. (2009). However, this finding

contradicts with the findings of Alwraikat, (2012) who reported students having positive attitudes. It is very important to bear in mind, when comparing this finding with Alwraikat (2012), that his sample included Master's and PhD students and the sample of his research included small sample of the population. A possible explanation for the moderate attitudes of students might be attributed to the fact that students do make use of portfolios for revising for their exams.

The second question of this study sought to determine teachers' and students' challenges regarding the use of portfolio as an assessment tool in the foundation programme at the University. It was found that teachers find the portfolio assessment demanding because there are no clear objectives for using the portfolios and no clear marking criteria. Another challenge is the large amount of portfolio tasks. Similar findings were observed by Al-nouh et al. (2014) and Bagheri and Ghaffari (2017), in which teachers reported that portfolio assessment is demanding in terms of planning and marking. A possible explanation of these findings is that there is no clear match between the course objectives, the instructional objectives, and the objectives of the portfolio use in the foundation programme at the University. This finding is also related to Brown's (2004) argument, in which he stated that teachers should be very cautious about the objectives and purpose of using portfolios in assessment in order to have a good portfolio practice.

In addition, the study found that students faced some challenges regarding the large amount of time spent on portfolios, the large number of tasks involved in the portfolio, and the lack of a clear organization and selection process. These findings are in agreement with Davis et al. (2009), in which portfolio assessment was seen a very demanding process that takes a lot of time for students and interferes with their learning process and time.

The study aimed to collect teachers' and students' suggestions to improve the portfolio assessment practice in the foundation programme at the University. The teachers suggested having clearer objectives and marking criteria, including other speaking and listening skills, and trying to use e-portfolios. These findings support the views of Moya and O'Malley (1994), who stated the importance of the planning stage in which the purpose, contents, collection procedures, and marking criteria are identified in order to have a successful practice. It also supports Brown's (2004) views on the importance of communicating marking criteria to students. Students voiced different suggestions; the common suggestions were receiving feedback on their portfolios, scheduling class-time for portfolio revision, and having an e-portfolio.

5. Conclusion

Although the findings of this study might be disappointing to teachers and students, they provided a very good signal for improvements in the practice of portfolio assessment carried out in the foundation programme of the University. Due to the limitations of the current study, these findings will doubtlessly be greatly scrutinized, but the implications drawn from these findings are worth consideration.

Based on the findings of this study, it seemed that the foundation programme at the University should consider revising the objectives and purposes of using the portfolio assessment practice, which will eventually lead to better attitudes in both teachers and students. Course and instructional objectives should be mapped to the objectives of the portfolio. An induction session for teachers, to show them the rational, objectives, and marking criteria for the portfolio, is required. A similar induction session for students is highly recommended. Samples of good portfolios should be identified and used during the teachers' and students' induction sessions.

Also, the findings of this study suggest that the portfolio at the University should include all the language skills, along with different tasks to support self- and peer-assessment. Another implication of this study is the importance of revision intervals for reviewing students' work and providing them with feedback on their work. The foundation programme at the University should also consider trying out e-portfolios, as was suggested by both teachers and students. This may provide the students with various opportunities for language development and may be a very good chance to effectively make use of the LMS system, provided by the University to all its students.

As explained earlier, a number of limitations need to be considered when referring to this research. The major limitation of the study lies in the fact that the research data was collected using only questionnaires. The scope of the current study was very limited as it only examined teachers' and students' views about portfolio use.

Since this is the first study to shed light upon portfolio assessment in the foundation programme at the University, further research is needed to gain deeper insights and improvements. This study uses descriptive research methods to measure only teachers' and students' attitudes, so what is needed now is an experimental study to measure the effectiveness of using portfolios on students' language development. Since teachers and students articulated a need for trying e-portfolios, a study is needed to explore the institution's, teachers', and students'

readiness to use e-portfolios.

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