

## Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Use of the Student's Portfolio in Moroccan EFL Middle School Classes

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### Abstract

Recently, there has been a great shift in the teaching methods in Morocco, requiring more focus on the principles of autonomous learning and the competencies that students should develop and acquire. This shift in language teaching necessitates other forms of assessment to support the already existing traditional ways of assessing students that might include different forms of performance assessment which can support the competency-based instruction that the curriculum of teaching English in Middle Schools in Morocco adheres to. Nevertheless, the types of assessing Moroccan EFL learners, therefore, do not match with the competencies targeted in the language textbooks being used in Moroccan schools since traditional means of assessing students such as quizzes, tests and exams are still prevalent in most classes the fact which does not give the chance to teachers to provide concrete judgement about the student's growth and development over time. The present study, therefore, explored the attitudes of ELT teachers in Moroccan Middle schools towards the use of the student's portfolio as an alternative assessment tool in language teaching. The study started with the hypothesis stipulating that if teachers were aware of the importance of using the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool, they could effectively measure students' growth and development. In order to test this hypothesis, the study opted for the questionnaire as a research instrument to answer two main research questions which aim at identifying (i) the teachers' awareness of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular (ii) teachers' perception the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool. As far as data collection is concerned, the study opted for the use of the questionnaire as a research instrument which in turn was analysed quantitatively using the IBM SPSS Statistics Software. On the basis of the study findings, it was revealed that portfolio assessment is not only an effective tool for assessment purposes but it is also useful for learning and that teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool in Moroccan middle schools.

**Keywords:** Portfolio, portfolio Assessment, alternative assessment, performance-based assessment, authentic assessment.

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### I. Introduction

Looking for a new and innovative way to assess students, the student portfolio remains a pivotal authentic means of assessment to improve learning and to evaluate students' performance. (Yang, 2003). In this regard, researchers including Mokhtari (2014), Rochelle (2008), Chen (2002), and others have provided insight about the value and the effectiveness of portfolio assessment. For this very specific regard, the present research paper explored the use of the student's portfolio as an alternative assessment tool in Moroccan EFL classrooms and it basically investigated teachers' awareness and attitudes towards the use of the student's portfolio. The main objective of the study is to investigate the way teachers view students' portfolios which can be used in the instruction and learning of English in Moroccan Middle Schools and especially as an alternative tool to support assessment which is an important factor in language teaching and learning, the fact which makes teachers responsible for their students' performance. The main goal behind assessing students' performance can be of two folds as Hughes and Wade (1996) demonstrates that teachers are required to assess for two crucial reasons: to record students' progress in order to share with parents as well as to know students' growth and development in order to information to enhance learning.

For teachers to realize the above-mentioned aims behind assessment, they need to implement and an alternative means of assessment which is referred to in the literature as 'alternative assessment'. The latter has received considerable focus from educators and researchers from different countries. Researching this subject, therefore, would be important not only for educators, but also for policy makers, textbook authors, supervisors, and any other stakeholders involved with language teaching and learning.

In recent years, Morocco has witnessed a remarkable change in the teaching methods. There is now more focus on competencies that students should acquire and develop and a strong requirement for autonomous learning. As a result of this shift in language teaching, the English Language Guidelines for Middle Schools issued in August 2009 states that performance assessment is required for the curriculum of teaching English in Middle Schools since it adheres to the competency-based instruction. However, traditional tools of assessment are still dominating in most classes where tests and quizzes are administered as the only means of assessing students which does not go in line with the competencies targeted in the language textbooks being used in Moroccan middle schools and the mode of assessment remains unchanged.

The main purpose of the study, therefore, is to find out teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of the student portfolio as an alternative assessment strategy for teaching English to Moroccan learners in Middle Secondary Schools.

## **II. Concept Defining**

Reviewing the literature about portfolio assessment, it can be understood that portfolio assessment is a regular and organized compilation of student's work that is used by both teacher and student to keep track with the student' growth and progress in a particular subject. Douglas (2000). In the same context, portfolio assessment is specifically outlined as "an ongoing process involving the student and the teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the student's progress." In fact, portfolio assessment is one type of alternative assessment that can comprises other forms such as authentic assessment, performance-based assessment, and portfolio assessment (Hancock 1994). Concerning, alternative assessment it is a general term that covers the different alternative ways to standardized tests. These alternative assessments to the traditional testing are process-oriented and involve some kind of tasks related to real-life situations. Alternative Assessment is, therefore, "performance assessment that emphasizes that these assessment methods provide an alternative to traditional paper-and-pencil testing" (Gronlund & Waugh, 2009).

## **III. Literature Review**

The requirement for alternative assessment tools has grown as a result of the advancements in teaching techniques. Therefore, and because the learning process and the student development are neglected, traditional assessment instruments like exams and quizzes which are designed to evaluate the product—have become inadequate for assessing learning. As a result, different innovative teaching methods have required the necessity of the design of new, creative assessment techniques and strategies which include the use of the portfolio as a performance-based assessment.

### ***Teachers Awareness of the Importance of Portfolio Assessment***

Numerous studies have demonstrated that the portfolio, an alternative assessment tool, is an effective method for carrying out in-class formative assessment. By using portfolio assessment, educators may better understand their students, spot areas in which pupils are falling behind, and design instructional strategies to help them catch up, (Barton and Collins 1997, Norman 1998).

In light with the reviewed literature related to teachers' attitudes towards portfolio assessment, it has been remarked that there are several research studies which advocate the idea that some teachers do use portfolios in their classes. In this case, Beyhan, Kuran, and Tunc (2012) conducted a study and analysed pre-service teachers' portfolio awareness level. They found out that the Awareness of pre-service teachers towards the portfolio was of a medium level, meaning that more improvement is required in this regard.

Not very differently, Tonbul (2009) investigated how students of English language teaching perceived and felt about the electronic portfolio as a tool for learning and assessment in a project entitled "An E-Portfolio Model for Students of Department of English Language Teaching, Gazi University". Tonbul's study aimed to ascertain experiences related to the establishment of electronic portfolios in order to provide instructors and students with an electronic portfolio model. Tonbul (ibid) concluded that by the time the study was over, students had grown to enjoy using their e-portfolios, and they had found that utilizing them to communicate with teachers and other students was beneficial and that writing abilities were seen to improve during the e-portfolio preparation procedure.

### ***Teachers' Views Towards the Use of the Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Tool***

The latest developments in education have brought about a considerable alteration in the idea of the student evaluation system. One such method of gauging pupils' growth that takes into account both the process and outcome of learning is portfolio assessment. Despite this shift, some educators are aware of portfolio assessment and have positive opinions about it, while other educators are not aware of it and are still greatly influenced by traditional and standardized testing, which prevents them from having a clear understanding of portfolio assessment. In line with this, Coombe, Purmensky & Davidson (2012) and Bataineh & Obeiah (2016),

this kind of assessment puts greater emphasis on the learners' development by evaluating pupils based on what they produce and integrate rather than what they recall and replicate.

More on this, Different educators in earlier research have demonstrated that portfolios have many benefits. In fact, portfolios are learning tools that support students' progress in their academic accomplishment, according to Bataineh & Obeiah (ibid). Additionally, portfolios are self-directed learning. Furthermore, portfolios can be viewed as instruments for attaining motivation, which gives students a feeling of achievement, particularly when they complete their assignments and construct their portfolios as stated by Samad and Singh (2013).

Considering the aforementioned claims, it can be concluded that teachers need to take students' portfolios into account as they have been widely been recommended as effective tools for both teaching and assessment. Teachers, in fact, are the main factors influencing the use of the students' portfolios as alternative assessment tool. They are also responsible for the success or the failure, to some extent, of portfolio projects in the classroom. Thus, teachers play an essential role in managing students' products in the classrooms.

#### **IV. Methodology**

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the use of portfolio as an alternative assessment tool in Moroccan middle schools with the aim to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are teachers aware of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular?
2. What are the teachers' attitudes towards the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool?

The hypothesis to be tested in this study is the following:

If teachers were aware of the importance of using the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool, they could effectively measure students' learning via tracing their growth and development.

#### **Research Design**

Given the nature of the topic, the present study has opted for the quantitative research design making use of the questionnaire as a research instrument. The quantitative research design is defined by Mertons (2009) as "research that measures variables in a quantifiable way" (p.3). This type of research design experiments the outcomes of an experience and the validity of the quantitative method depends on the precision of the numerical data (Bryman, 2004).

#### **Sample**

Because of the nature of this study, a representative sample of the population is required in order to thoroughly and properly investigate teachers' attitudes toward the use of portfolios as an alternative tool. The survey questionnaire was distributed and sent via Google Forms, targeting, Moroccan middle school teachers working in different regions in Morocco.

#### **Instrument**

To collect data, a questionnaire was completed by 77 EFL teachers and analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics Software to calculate the percentages of the answers and to deduce relevant conclusions. The questionnaire was developed according to the two themes mentioned in the research questions and reviewed accordingly in the literature review.

#### **V. Results**

This section presents the findings of the questionnaire distributed to teachers. The present study was conducted to see to what extent are teachers aware of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular in Moroccan Middle schools. The questionnaire as a research instrument was meant to collect data in order to answer the two main research questions which aim to identify (i) the extent to which teachers are aware of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular (ii) how teachers perceive the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool Therefore, the study's results are presented according to the themes mentioned in the research questions and the data obtained is transferred using descriptive statistics.

#### **Teachers' awareness of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular**

This section of the questionnaire is about the teachers' awareness of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular. Teachers were asked six main questions to unravel their views and perceptions towards the portfolio implementation. First, teachers were asked two different questions about their feelings about using the student portfolio as an alternative assessment tool. 93,7 % of the

total respondents answered that the students' portfolio is an interesting and a positive educational tool. This reality asserts that teachers have positive views towards the use of the student portfolio as an alternative assessment tool as a large number of teachers declared that they are they acknowledged the benefit of using student portfolios and agreed that the use of the student portfolio can help them in assessing their students' growth and development.

Second, teachers were also asked about the type of assessment they are regularly using. The results revealed that a percentage of 54,1 % for teachers who regularly use both traditional assessment and alternative assessment. Third, teachers were asked if they used portfolio assessment with their students and the result was that 1,4 % of teachers reported that they always use the portfolio with their students.

### ***Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Use of the Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Tool***

In this section of the questionnaire, the questions prepared were meant to investigate teachers' attitudes towards the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool. The data revealed that

The first question was about the things that happen with supervisors such as talking about students' portfolios, giving teachers samples of students' products and providing teachers with training on alternative assessment. The following chart displays that teachers do not receive any suggestions from their supervisors concerning alternative assessment during pedagogical meetings and that teachers at work almost never talk to each other about the student portfolio and it also displays that teachers do not discuss other alternative assessment tools to use in class with their students. In addition, it was revealed that the majority of teachers still do not clearly understand the value of using portfolio as a tool of assessing students' learning. Finally, the study findings show that a high percentage of teachers never ask their students to develop their own portfolios, but at the same time, there are some teachers who advise their students to create their own portfolios at some intervals during the academic year.

## **VI. Discussion**

This section discusses the findings of the questionnaire which was distributed to teachers. The discussion is based on the literature being review and the themes mentioned in the two research questions, namely (i) the extent to which teachers are aware of the importance of alternative assessment in general and portfolio assessment in particular (ii) how teachers perceive the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment tool.

### ***Teachers' Awareness of the Importance of Alternative Assessment in General and Portfolio Assessment in Particular***

The current study examined teachers' attitudes towards the use of the student's portfolio in Moroccan middle schools. The findings showed that teachers had positive attitudes towards the use of the student portfolio as an alternative assessment tool as has been in the section about the study result, especially when teachers were asked about feelings and views towards alternative assessment. Besides, teachers reported that portfolio implementation as an assessment tool is very beneficial for both teachers and students teaching, learning and assessment processes. In line with this, Paulson, Paulson & Meyer (1991) demonstrate that portfolio assessment gives an opportunity for teachers and students to observe students in a broader context. In the same context, Adams (1998) asserts that portfolio presents a wide perspective of learning process for students and enables continuous feedback for them. This claim is further affirmed by De Fina (1992) that a portfolio allows students to self-assess their learning and reflect on their progress.

However, the majority of teachers reported that they do not use portfolio assessment with their students although they are aware of the importance of using portfolios in their classrooms. Therefore, it was found that there is a discrepancy between portfolio assessment and its implementation in classrooms since the majority of teachers reported that students' portfolios are very interesting and very important, but they do not implement it with their students as affirmed by Mokhtari (2014). The discrepancy between teachers' views and their actual classroom practices might be due to different obstacles that teacher may face while implementing portfolio assessment in Moroccan EFL classrooms. Hence, portfolios have many benefits while being implemented in classrooms, but there are always some challenges in using it portfolio in teaching and learning as Lo (2010) points out in her action research:

*The reading and grading load was enormous, as was that of answering students' questions. For questions I could not answer, I had to spend time locating answers as well. Despite the greatly reduced number of questions, the reading and grading load was still very heavy. To meet the administration's deadline for submitting final grades, I was forced to write short comments and had no time to correct grammatical errors. The six entries I had insisted on to establish the habit of reading newspapers had become a massive burden for me. (p. 87)*

### ***Teachers Attitudes Towards the Use of the Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment Tool***

In an answer to the second research question which is about the teachers' attitudes towards the use of the student's portfolio as an alternative assessment tool, the study revealed that teachers had positive attitudes towards implementing the student's portfolio in their classrooms as portfolios offer useful benefits for both teachers and students and that portfolios improve students' learning as they get engaged in building knowledge, activating their schemata and integrating varied skills and competences while creating and designing a portfolio.

In investigating the attitudes of teachers and students regarding the use of portfolio as an assessment tool, the research revealed that teachers had positive attitudes toward the idea that portfolio assessment improves students' learning through the worksheets that they do in the classroom which is fun and especially when students develop their sense of accomplishment when they write self-reflection for following the lesson and realize that they have learned something and have grown academically. Hence, portfolio assessment enables students to reflect their real performance, to show their weak and strong domain and to observe student's progress during the learning process, and encourages students to take responsibilities for their own learning, giving the chance to students to be more creative, motivated, autonomous, and engaged. Portfolio assessment, therefore, appears to produce more influencing advantages as Dudley (2001, p.19) states that "portfolios are a simple yet powerful idea".

## **VII. Implications**

In light of the investigated topic concerning teachers' attitudes towards the use of students' portfolio as an alternative assessment tool in Moroccan Middle schools, a number of suggestions can be drawn. According to the findings of the study, it can be deduced that Morocco needs institutional support in order to encourage the use of alternative assessment methods. This support will play a significant role in raising teachers' awareness of authentic assessment methodologies and classroom assessment. For example, portfolio assessment could be emphasized by decision makers as an additional component of assessing students in order to authentically trace the growth and development of the learners. In addition, it is suggested that more training in alternative assessment is required for the benefit of teachers in order to effectively enhance their proficiency in the assessment of their learners. From perspectives, ELT inspectors and trainers need to offer teacher as well as teacher trainees workshops, seminars, and short courses with the aim to train them on how to implement portfolio assessment in their classrooms because proper implementation can yield favourable outcomes for portfolios.

## **VIII. Limitations and Lines for Future Research**

The present study is not without limitations. For instance, some teachers were not able to filling out the questionnaire due to time constraints. Also, the number of participants was not as expected since the questionnaire was distributed to 150 teachers, but only 77 of them who managed to complete the survey. Finally, it was planned to distribute questionnaires for students to investigate their feelings, attitudes and behaviours in regards to alternative assessment and portfolio assessment, assuming that both teachers and students are essential contributors to teaching and learning. But due to time constraint, the questionnaire for students was postponed until future research.

Having researched the issue of teachers' attitudes towards the use of the student portfolio as an alternative assessment tool, it can be understood that this issue is an important field of study that requires further investigation especially what has been mentioned previously concerning the study limitations. Hence, further experimental research could be conducted to investigate students' perceptions and views towards portfolio assessment along with an investigation on the effect of alternative assessment and portfolio assessment on students' learning in secondary school.

## **IX. Conclusion**

As has been established in the introduction and methodology sections, the aim of this research paper was to investigate the attitudes of Moroccan EFL teachers' towards using students' portfolios as an alternative assessment tool in Moroccan Middle schools. The findings of the study revealed that teachers had positive attitudes towards the idea of implementing the student's portfolio as an alternative assessment tool. In addition, the study results showed that the use of students' portfolios as an alternative assessment instrument are valued by teachers because they enhance learner-centeredness through enabling the learners to play an important role in the learning process as a whole including assessment. Portfolios, therefore, have an important role in EFL teaching and assessment as they have positive impact on students' learning. It was also found that there is a discrepancy between teachers' perceptions towards the use of the student portfolio and their real practices in classrooms which means that teachers agree with the valuable role a portfolio can afford for students, but most of them are unable to use it due to different factors. Students' portfolios have been found to afford great educational benefits and thus, further research can be conducted to investigate the impact of student's portfolio on learning, teaching, and assessment. However, and despite all the strengths of portfolio assessment, it cannot be used yet as an alternative

for tests. In fact, each type of assessment certainly has its advantages and drawbacks; different assessment tools may complement each other.

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