



Exploring English for Specific Purposes Teachers' Attitude towards Electronic-Portfolio Assessment

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine teachers' attitude and teachers' needs concerning the use of electronic-portfolio assessment in ESP courses in some Institutes of Higher Education in Shiraz, Fars province. Thirty five teachers of institutes of higher education participated in this study. In an attempt to investigate teachers' attitude towards electronic-portfolio assessment in ESP courses, survey questionnaire concerning the use of student portfolio assessment was employed. Findings of the present study revealed that teachers still needed help in utilizing all steps of student portfolio assessment. Findings also indicated that this study provide valuable guidelines and implications for educational authorities in universities in order to help ESP teachers meet their needs and develop their performance on the use of student portfolio assessment especially E-portfolio assessment.

Keywords: teachers' attitude, teachers' needs, electronic-portfolio, electronic-portfolio assessment, English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) emphasize two principles: (1) efficiency of instruction by focusing on the learner's specific needs; and (2) communication by attempting to increase the learner's communicative ability to function in authentic discourse situations (Strevens, 1979). Thus, teaching of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has evolved out of these two basic principles in academic settings. A huge amount of research has attempted to identify important factors to student success by assessing the relations among many psychological and academic variables. According to Mbathia (2005), education supplies people with specific skills and therefore it enables them to perform their tasks effectively. Many factors have impact on academic performance, as Owiti (2001) describes, attitude leads to achievement and abilities are needed for successful performance.

Therefore, to achieve acceptable performance, the close relationship between teaching and testing in educational settings (Ebel, 1972) suggests that testing methods in ESL should be directed towards teaching approaches. Therefore, providing tools that involve students during the process of learning and receiving feedback seems to be helpful but before starting how teachers cope with them and what they think are on priority.

Since technologies have emerged in teaching as effective tools, this study aims to see teachers' attitude toward implementing electronic-portfolio assessment (e-portfolio) in ESP classes. The electronic portfolio has been selected because of its flexibility and open framework, the opportunities that exist to individualize learning, and the engagement of the learner in the process of reflection and assessing their own progress.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

The researcher, as an experienced teacher in ESP courses teaching, believes students do not see themselves progressing and attribute this lack of progress to lack of ability. They see foreign language especially for specific purposes as too difficult and do not want to devote the time to continue their learning. Many researches (Jafari & Kaufman, 2006) focus on the students' perspectives of their achievement by implementing electronic-portfolio. Instructors, particularly in higher and adult education, who are the ones required to implement electronic portfolio in their courses as an assessment tool, are not the focus of many studies.

Unfortunately, developments in testing have not been fast enough to cope with instructional advancements. Especially in the context of ESP, testing has received the least attention and almost no practical attempt has been made to develop tests which fulfill the needs of the field. It seems that the problem comes from teachers' attitudes to cope with new tools in language classrooms and to get better performance of learners. There is a gap in the literature concerning instructor's perceptions of the effectiveness of e-portfolios as both promoting (i.e. assessing-for-learning) and assessing (i.e. assessing-on-learning) students' achievement of educational objectives. Furthermore, due to the aim of the present study, it seems that investigating teachers' attitudes toward electronic portfolio to engage learners in their learning process and continual assessment during the class period be necessary to see how helpful it can be in enhancing achievement in ESP and eliminating their anxiety.

This study was designed to describe and analyze the teachers' attitude toward implementing e-portfolio as an assessment tool in ESP classes and see the reasons of challenges in coping with it.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study sought to understand the following research question and null hypothesis:

- RQ. Do teachers have positive attitude toward e-portfolio assessment in ESP classes?

- H₀. Teachers do not have positive attitude toward implementing e-portfolio assessment in ESP classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Using e-portfolios in ESL classroom enhances learning within social context where students' cooperation and work together. Vygotsky's (1978) notion of learning through social development is one theory that reinforces using e- portfolios. Vygotsky (1978) explained that constructivism has an effective role in the widely spread use of paper-based portfolios in education, believing that knowledge exists within "social relationship" (p. 7). Social constructivist theory values collaborative learning and discussion that construct new knowledge among learners within social and cultural context. Although it does not view student learning as a direct result of the teacher actions in the classroom, it views students as partners in teaching-learning process and who are capable of adopting new ideas and methods (Levin, 1999). Using e-portfolios and new technologies foster social interaction, meaningful context, and interpersonal support with teachers and students' peers. This social constructivist approach helps teachers to build new bridges through constructivist experiences (Jacobsen, 2002; Levin & Wadmany, 2006). Thus, changes in the learning environment expand and enrich classroom practices and influence students' view of integrating learning and technology.

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), the demands of a brave world, a revolution in linguistics and focus on the learner were the three common reasons for the birth of ESP. also, they defined ESP more broadly as "an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and methods are based on the learners' need for learning" (p. 19). These definitions, thus, makes it clear that learners' specific need is the foundation on which the entire edifice of ESP is established.

In regards to e-portfolios, that is better to say, it referred to as electronic and digital portfolios by various current authors (e.g. Barrett, 2005; Yancey, 2001; Jafari & Kaufmann, 2006), are distinguished from the traditional or hard copy portfolio by access and delivery, which is usually through a commercial e-portfolio course management system or in-house server supporting student web pages (Johnson, 2006). The critical advantage of this delivery is that the artifacts can be collected, saved, and stored in an electronic or digital format. The major types of portfolios as identified by Danielson & Abrutyn (1997) and adapted by Barrett (2005) are (a) working or employment portfolios, (b) display or showcase portfolios, and (c) assessment or educational portfolios. Purpose and audience determine variations of the portfolio types, which in most cases are (a) accountability for an audience of organization or institution stakeholders; (b) learning for an audience of instructors, peers, and students; and (c) marketing for an audience of clients and future employers (Barrett & Carney, 2005). As far as the purpose of assessment portfolios is concerned, variation is determined by the focus on either the process (formative, assessment-for-learning), which allows instructor feedback and reflection on the students' skills at any given time during the assessment; or on the product (summative, assessment of-learning), for which criteria and expectations are specified (Stiggins, 2002). DiBiase (2002) from Penn State University

and one of the pioneers in using e-portfolios defined them as being "personalized, Web-based collections that include selective evidence from coursework, artifacts from extra-curricular activities, and reflective annotations and commentary related to these experiences" (p. 2). In other words, e-portfolios depend on gathering, organizing, and evaluating the best works as well as mastering learning skills and self-assessment. A more in depth definition is by Barrett (2000) and Abrami and Barrett (2005), who described the e-portfolios as "a digital container (that is) capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, video, and sound" (p. 2). Finally, Cambridge (2010) stated that an e-portfolio "presents a theory, story, or map that articulates the relationships between the different material included and synthesizes their meaning" (p. 136). He also described an e-portfolio as a genre and defined it "as fundamentally a type of composition, an emerging genre" (p. 8).

Relatively, Uçara and, Yazıcı (2016) aimed to investigate the effect of portfolios on developing writing skills among in ESP classes. This study was carried out on two groups – experimental and control groups- each of which consists of 26 students. Throughout the study the experimental group was taught through portfolio assessment technique and the control group was taught through the conventional method. The result signifies that portfolios had a statistically significant effect on promoting writing performance and its sub skills in ESP classes and also showed that students have positive attitudes towards using portfolios on improving their writing skills in ESP classes.

There are also many studies in related to e-portfolio. Mustafa (2011) conducted a one-year quantitative study to investigate to what extent formal training in electronic assessment could positively develop EFL teachers' knowledge, skills, and use of e-portfolios as an assessment tool. The findings indicated that the training program for using e-portfolios was effective in a sense that the learners kept developing and using e-portfolios after ending the program. The results also showed high quality of design, organization, and content of e-portfolios.

Moreover, Genc and Tinmaz (2010) conducted a qualitative study on 42 preservice teachers at Computer Education and Instructional Technology at the University of Firat in Turkey. The study showed that e-portfolios were more suitable for project-based courses and higher education and also were more personal, planned, and educational without any type of commercial concerns compared to regular websites.

In the same vein, Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia (Price, 2006) implemented e-portfolios for their Freshman Year Writing program and Sophomore Writing Portfolio, respectively. These studies have shown that challenges presented during and after e-portfolio implementation are in the areas of (a) available resources, for instance tools or platforms; (b) scoring associated with high stakes, summative, or assessment on learning e-portfolios; and (c) training for students and instructors, as well as professional development for instructors that focus on strategies for sustainability (Price, 2006). The results of these studies of implementation have come a long way in shedding light on the numerous benefits and challenges of e-portfolio use in higher education.

Therefore, to the best of the researcher's knowledge there were little, if any, studies on teachers' attitude toward utilizing e-portfolio in ESP classrooms. It seems that the result of the present study be a bridge to this gap. The details of the findings are followed.

METHOD

Participants

This study was carried out during the academic year of 2016-2017 among ESP teachers of different majors at Higher Education Institutes includes Apadana (N=8), Eram Shiraz (N=8), Zand (N=7), Pishtazan (N=6) and Hafez (N=6) in Shiraz, Fars province. From among 42 teachers, 35 male and female teachers were ready to use E-portfolio assessment in their classes and participated in the study. The age of the participants ranged from 29 to 48. Almost all passed the duration of ADSL.

Instruments

A survey questionnaire used in this research study was divided into three parts (see Appendix A). In part one teacher gender, education level, as well as grades and subjects the respondents taught in higher education were asked as the respondents' demographic information. In part two, the respondents were asked to rate their feeling about using e-portfolios to assess students' learning on a seven-point semantic differential scale. In part three, a "five-point rating scale was employed to ask the respondents' perception on the current and desired performance on the use of student portfolio assessment. The use of student portfolio assessment was divided into 4 main steps, i.e., (a) planning for portfolio assessment, (b) collecting created products, (c) selecting products and reflecting on selected products, (d) revising and evaluating products, and (e) utilizing portfolio assessment results (Burke et al., 1994). The reliability of this questionnaire was 0.95 as determined by the Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Procedure

In different sessions, the researcher in person visited teachers in different higher education institutes in Shiraz. E-portfolio and its applications, benefits were explained to them. They were convinced to use them during the term. Electronic portfolio, e-portfolios, Web-based portfolios, technology-based portfolio, and digital portfolio are names for the same tool, which rises from e-learning and becomes widely used in different disciplines (Barrett, 2006). As was mentioned in review literature by different researchers, E-portfolio is a personalized, Web-based collections that include selective evidence from coursework, artifacts from extra-curricular activities, and reflective annotations and commentary related to these experiences, and also is a digital container (that is) capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, video, and sound and learners can present a theory, story, or map composition, an emerging genre such as an autobiography, story, or a journal. Students are involved during the process and you can assess their progress during the term, give them feedback and eliminate their anxiety of the final paper tests. And it is done in a way that students scan their

assignments and upload a copy on the page, the teacher check them, put his/her comments, then students revise it and finally get their scores.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed or emailed to teachers in all institutes of Higher Education in Shiraz. They sent back the completed questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Means and standard deviation were employed to analyze teachers' attitudes towards the use of e-portfolio assessment, whereas dependent-sample *t*-test between the desired and the current performance of the use of student portfolio assessment was used to determine teachers' needs on the use of student portfolio assessment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

Teachers' Attitude towards the Use of Student Portfolio Assessment

Teachers' attitude towards implementing portfolio assessment as a tool to assess student learning in ESP, measured by using the seven-point semantic differential scale, shown in Table 1. Overall, teachers had positive attitude on the use of student portfolio assessment. Their attitude was most positive towards the interest in the use of using portfolio assessment ($M = 6.29$, $SD = 1.00$), followed by the appropriateness of the use of portfolio assessment ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 1.09$), the usefulness of using portfolio assessment ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.09$), and. On the other hand, their attitude was least positive towards the clearness and time in using student portfolio assessment ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 2.10$ and $M = 5.05$, $SD = 2.00$, respectively) .

Table 1. Teachers' attitude towards the use of student portfolio assessment

Bipolar pair	M	SD
1-Difficult-easy	6.02	1.02
2-Useless-useful	6.12	1.09
3-Time-consuming-timesaving	4.08	2.10
4-Burdensome-unburden some	6.05	.87
5-Indispensable-dispensable	6.2	1.02
6-Substantial-insubstantial	6.00	1.09
7-Inappropriate-appropriate	6.16	1.09
8-Boring-interesting	6.29	1.00
9-Economical-wasteful	6.00	1.17
10-Ambiguous-clear	5.05	2.00

Assessment of Teachers about the Use of Student Portfolio Assessment

Teachers' rating on the desired and current performance on the use of student portfolio assessment is shown in Table 2. It was found that overall the difference between the desired and current performance of teachers on the use of student portfolio assessment in all of the steps (i.e., planning for portfolio assessment, collecting created products,

selecting products and reflecting on selected products, revising and evaluating products, and utilizing portfolio assessment results) were statistically significant ($p < .01$). In the current performance on the use of student portfolio assessment, it was found that teachers rated collecting created products as the best step being performed ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.42$), followed by planning for portfolio assessment, ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 0.36$), utilizing portfolio assessment results ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.37$), revising and evaluating products ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.33$), and selecting products and reflecting on selected products ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.38$), respectively. In the desired performance on the use of student portfolio assessment, it was revealed that teachers rated utilizing portfolio assessment results as the most desired step ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.22$), followed by revising and evaluating products ($M = 4.1$, $SD = 0.23$), selecting products and reflecting on selected products ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 0.23$), planning for portfolio assessment ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.20$), and collecting created products ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.22$), respectively.

Table 2. Teachers Use of Student Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio process	Desired		Current		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
1-planning for portfolio assessment	3.90	.20	3.31	.36	9.27**
2-collecting created products	3.68	.22	3.34	.42	9.29**
3-selecting products and reflecting on selected products	3.97	.23	2.93	.38	9.91**
4-revising and evaluating products	4.01	.23	3.15	.33	15.12**
5-utilizing portfolio assessment results	4.06	.22	3.23	.37	12.72**
N	35				

The result of this study indicated, that, overall teachers were found to have positive attitudes on the use of student portfolios. Their attitude was most positive on the interest in the use of portfolio assessment. On the other hand, their attitude was least positive on the clearness and time in using student portfolio assessment. This is consistent with other previous research studies. Samnaingdee's (2003) study found that teachers with different teaching experience had positive attitudes toward the use of portfolio assessment. Moreover, Khantong (2000) revealed that teachers had positive attitudes toward the use of portfolio assessment in all subjects. The finding of the present study that have a positive attitude towards the use of student portfolio assessment in ESP courses provides good opportunities for administrators and other educational authorities in further improving teacher performance in this regard. Moreover, a positive attitude on the use of portfolio assessment could also help teachers deal with any problems in using student portfolio assessment since research shows that a positive attitude helps people cope with troubles more easily (Sasson, 2007).

In addition, the results, which show there is a statistically significant difference between the desired and current performance of teachers on the use of student portfolio assessment in all of the steps (i.e., planning for portfolio assessment, collecting created products, selecting products and reflecting on selected products, revising and evaluating products, and utilizing portfolio assessment results), indicated that teachers had needs with the use of student(s) portfolios in all of the steps of student portfolio assessment. Similar findings were found in the previous research study of Kornketkamon (2001)

which found that teachers had problems in the use of portfolio assessment, especially encouraging students to organize their artifacts in the portfolios, giving students as well as parents a chance to express their opinion on students' artifacts, and utilizing the students' portfolios as a means to evaluate the success of teachers' instruction. In addition, this research findings are also consistent with Srirod (2002) which found that teachers has some difficulties in guiding students in selecting the products in their portfolios, encouraging students to reflect on their products, as well as guiding students to evaluate their products and learning.

CONCLUSION

As the aim of conduction the present study was to consider ESP teachers attitude towards implementing E-portfolio assessment in classroom sessions, the findings of survey questionnaires revealed that teachers still needed help in utilizing all steps of student portfolio assessment. That may be because in the first decade of educational reform teachers concentrated more on teaching methods rather than assessment methods (Wongwanich & Wiratchai, 2005). The findings of this study provide valuable guidelines and implications for educational authorities in universities in order to help ESP teachers meet their needs and develop their performance on the use of student portfolio assessment especially E-portfolio assessment. Workshop training sessions on the use of student portfolio assessment should be provided for teachers. The step of selecting products and reflecting on the selected products, the step of revising and evaluating products, as well as the step of utilizing portfolio assessment results should be incorporated and heavily emphasized in the training sessions. Besides, in order to make teachers understand the process of student portfolio assessment more clearly, the workshop sessions should be in hands-on format so that teachers will have opportunities to practice using student portfolio assessment step by step .

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Appendix A: Survey on Teacher Attitude and Needs Assessment concerning the Use of Student Portfolio Assessment

Part 1. Demographic Information

Direction. Please mark with specific regards to your personal information.

1. Gender Male Female

2. Level of education Bachelor degree Master degree Doctoral degree

3. Teaching experience less than 5 years 5-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years
21-25 years more than 30 years

5. Subject taught architecture telecommunication graphic designing chemical engineering Mechanical engineering painting

Part 2. Teacher Attitude concerning the Use of Student E-Portfolio Assessment in Educational settings

Direction. Please complete the following questionnaire with specific regards to your personal information by pressing “P” in the appropriate box.

Using e- portfolio in an evaluation of students’ learning is

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
Easy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Difficult
Useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Useless
Time saving	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Time consuming
Unburdensome	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Burdensome
Indispensable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Dispensable
Substantial	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Insubstantial
Appropriate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Inappropriate
Boring	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Interesting
Wasteful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Economical
Clear	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Ambiguous

Direction. Please rate each item (1 = low, 5 = high) according to your perception on the current and desired performance on the use of student portfolio assessment.

[illegible]

