

# Investigating Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Teachers' Difficulties in Implementing Students' Portfolios Technique

Nisreen Kadhim Khudhair

*MA. Methods of Teaching English*

## Abstract

It is not easy to promote a high quality education for all people. In order to provide educational requirements for the whole population, building and developing many schools, employing a large numbers of teachers and to developing the educational curricula are needed. "Authentic assessment" is an increasingly common discourse in education. A portfolio technique is a type of alternative assessments where a student has opportunities to select or develop their work which they think is the best to encourage their study skills and performance. A portfolio is a purposeful selection of student work by both the student and the teacher over time to track student development.

The study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' difficulties in implementation portfolios.

To fulfill the aim, a sample of (40) EFL preparatory school teachers taken randomly from different schools .

A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this research to be an investigation instrument. The results of the research proves that the hypotheses of this research is accepted, which means that that Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers face difficulties in implementation portfolio technique.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The problem and its Significance

Change is the fate of nature and life. Nothing is static and constant. Things keep changing especially the social and culture phenomena, social and financial needs, community demands and aspirations of people. It is also clear that people always seek a change .Always change looks for improvement from the things, events, ideas or approaches. Rather change is

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desired in a progressive rather than retrogressive style (Mrunalini & Sudhakar, 2007:209).

Teachers promote many classroom situations in which the tradition pencil and paper test is insufficient for gathering needed data and evaluation information. As a result, educators are trying to redesign school assessment so that it reflects changing world conditions. To this end, many efforts are being directed toward authentic and performance assessment (Herman, 1998:19).

Evaluation doesn't just for pupils, classroom and students but for whole our life. Evaluation plays a major role in the learning process, both as motivational factors for the learners and as a tool for the teachers. Authentic assessment is a group of procedures and techniques which can be used within the context and stages of instruction and education (Lindsay & Knight, 2006:132).

It is useful with the domain of English as second language since it implements creative strategies and techniques that requires students to show their abilities and acquired language skills. Contrary to traditional testing, "students are evaluated on what they integrate and work production rather than on what they are able to reproduce, memorizing and recall" (Huerta-Macias, 1995:9). Within a context of communicative language teaching, one of the popular authentic assessments is portfolio technique. According to Genesee and Upshur (1996:99), a portfolio is a useful technique for a collection of students' work that shows their progress and achievements in particular subjects.

This study intends to answer this question:

What are the main difficulties that Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' faced in implementing portfolio technique?

### **1.2 Aim of the Study**

The study aims at investigating Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers' difficulties in implementation portfolios technique.

### **1.3 The Hypothesis**

It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers face difficulties in implementation portfolio technique.

### **1.4 Limits of the study**

This study is limited to:

1. Difficulties of implementation portfolios.
2. Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers.

## **1.5 Procedures**

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted to collect data:

1. Choosing a number of Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers (at random) to represent the study sample.
2. Preparing scaled questionnaire under a number of the specialists' supervision who examined its validity commented on it, and made many suggestions and modifications.
3. Interpreting the results in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means that suit the study.

## **1.6 Value of the Study**

1. The present study may be valuable for Iraqi EFL teachers to pinpointing the difficulties faced by them in implementing students' portfolios.
2. Teachers of English to devise the alternative methods and techniques that will help them to assess their students' overtime.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Authentic Assessment**

It is a continuous process that adapts a much broader domain for instruction. When a student answers a question, make a comment, or uses a new word or phrase, the teacher subconsciously evaluates students achievement and performance (Brown, 2004:4).

Since the early 1900s, student data have been collected by ways of teacher-made or standardized tests. Today there is an increasing call for alternative forms of assessment (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009:297).

In authentic assessments, unlike traditional assessments, students can create and form a response to a question or a task. However, in traditional assessments, the students just pick up a certain response from a given list, such as multiple-choice, true/false, or matching. Because the range of literacy proficiencies maybe quite vast in any classroom with learners, traditional testing formats is insufficient for the evaluation of English for the nonnative English speaker. The most effective types of assessments that teachers can use for making educational decisions are authentic performance-based assessments such as workshops, observations, journals, portfolios, and self assessments (Schultz, 2008:180).

### **2.2 Portfolio**

“The portfolio is a collection of work recording an individual's achievements over an extended period of time. They can be used at all stages of education and in a variety of ways to help the students develop reflective practice, assess their own progress” (Klenowski, 2012:3). There

are many form of authentic assessment as: portfolios, audio and video recordings, checklists, anecdotal records, diaries, writing folders, student magazine, journals, peer conferences, logs, and teacher-student conferences.

There are two main types of assessments: performance based assessment and portfolio assessment .In the former, teacher may require the students to perform certain tasks to evaluate specific skills. For the latter, portfolios are regarded as an effective way to put together both assessment and instructional objectives and goals. Portfolios are regarded as an embedded assessment; that is, the assessment tasks are a part of instruction and knowledge acquisition. Teachers decide what information and instructional goals are important and they put plans to achieve them effectively.

“Through observation during instruction and collecting knowledge and instruction, assessment flows directly from the instruction” (Shavleson, 1992:23).

A portfolio represents a collection of students work and instructional tasks that are put together for the purposes of assessment and student development and progress. It may include examples of classroom work, such as composition and paragraph writing, or homework exercises, such as projects, or even audio or video recordings. It can also consist of some pieces of self assessment, reflection and peer evaluation (Thornbury, 2006:170).

To avoid problems and difficulties associated with placement decisions on a single test or types of test, as well as to prompt students’ integration in the evaluation process, many language educators have begun to use an alternative form of assessment called a portfolio.

### **2.3 Portfolio Types**

Many teachers use different types of portfolios depending on their purposes, subjects and students needs. The four commonly used types are best piece portfolios, descriptive portfolios, process portfolios and accountability portfolios. Best piece portfolios require students to select samples that consider being their best works and efforts. They are popular because they motivate and encourage students to become more reflective about and involved in their own learning. Descriptive portfolios, on the other hand, enable teachers to gather and collect a wide variety of measures on the students’ progress they teach. Portfolios related to the writing skills are called process portfolios.

This type generally contains samples related to how students have grown as writers, authors and readers. Finally, accountability portfolios require that a satisfactory portfolio be presented at certain points in the learning and teaching processes. They include a list of contents and a representative sampling of the effective pieces of work along with a letter explaining and showing why each work piece was chosen as one of the best (Moor, 2007:334).

## **2.4 Portfolio Materials**

Teachers and students should negotiate what the portfolio will contain. There is no set list. Students can include pieces of their activities, efforts, works, reports, photos they have taken, you tube they have made, computer programs they have designed, drawing figures, test and exercises they have taken, homework and additional tasks they have completed. Effective portfolio contains certain a variety of representative, and productive materials (Orstein & Hunkins, 2009:300).

Portfolios usually include works and materials that have special meaning for the students in the process of learning, such as written work, tests, teacher's notes, teacher's feedback, self and peer assessment forms, newspaper articles, blogs or pictures from magazines, and so on. Because each types of portfolio is different, that is mean each pupil is being assessed individually on their own features and merits .Rather than being traditional thing imposed from outside, so portfolios regarded as collaborative and learner-centered. This encourages the students to be more involved and interested in the learning process and develop an awareness of how to assess their own progress and achievement.

Portfolios give students a chance to collect information about what their instructional needs (Lindsay & Knight, 2006:131).

Also, among other things, teachers can do the following: keeping checklists that connect portfolio work with features which are integral type of collected work. Teachers should discuss and reflect on their students work, regardless of the methods of teaching they follow to develop students' ability to critique their own progress and development in all students' personality, and improve their creative and critical thinking skills (ibid).

## **2.5 Benefits of Portfolios**

The benefits of portfolio are:

1. Students can assess their instructional progress and reflect over their learning,

2. Portfolios using makes continuous assessment and ongoing judgments over a long time,
3. Students make the products, works, tasks and according to their needs and they can feel a sense of achievement more compared to traditional tests,
4. Students may take control over their learning and feel more responsibility for it in order to reach to effective learning,
5. Students can know strengths points, weaknesses, and progress in their ability, in order to reset goals and plans more effectively by looking over their efforts (Apple & Shimo, 2005:53).

For achieving multiple perspectives on students' academic progress, teachers are required to include varying the types of material in the portfolio collection. Portfolios make students more responsible for their own knowledge acquisition and learning process. By making effective decisions about what to include in their portfolios, students become knowledge producers rather than knowledge receivers and imitators (Yoo, 2001:78).

## **2. 6 Successful Portfolio Steps**

The successful portfolio steps are:

- Putting Objectives.
- Planning and giving guidelines for materials included.
- Identifying assessment criteria to students.
- Allotting time within the curriculum and content for portfolio development.
- Providing an accessible place to keep portfolio.
- Designing periodic schedules for review and reflecting.
- Promoting positive wash back-giving final assessment (Brown, 2004:257).

Portfolio assessment is widely used in secondary and elementary schools in many areas today. Some schools have an activity which called portfolio sharing day, in which students have opportunities to tell others about their skills and learning (Milwaukee & Reinke, 2002:24).

Moreover, portfolio technique avoid the stress and 'one –off' problems of testing. It provides a much wider basis for ongoing development and evaluation, though there is likely to be a disproportionate focus on writing and reading skills. Thus, portfolios encourage students to form their own knowledge and skills base (constructivism) , portfolios represent an example for learner centered approach as opposed to teaching stimulus

provided by the teacher (behaviorism) as in traditional assessments (Ur, 2012:170).

## **2.7 Portfolio as an Essential Part of Effective Teaching**

Function of portfolio addresses all students' personality dimensions. Assessment and other means of evaluation need to gather data on the person as a whole: cognitive, affective, emotional, and moral dimensions. When student and teacher work and interact within various contexts and milieus. They interact with others inside and outside school. They need to evaluate the amount and quality of such communication, interactions and how they affect the curriculum, in order to achieve teaching and learning goals for promoting all instructional development dimensions (Orstein & Hunkins, 2009:302).

Today, changes in education strategies and approaches that focus on greater role for teacher involvement in designing curriculum and evaluating students, to improved portfolio use. Portfolios are regarded as one of an effective assessment tools because, they can be integrated into the context, curriculum, environment, and life events. And unlike separate tests, they save (rather than waste) time for instruction. They promote students instructional progress and based on learner needs. Moreover, many educators, teachers, and researchers see that portfolio techniques and strategies are more effective than traditional tests for assessing academic skills.

“The process known as metacognition, or thinking about one's thinking is a mental skill required of students for successful portfolio in which students take control of their learning by becoming informed critics of their own work”( Belgrad ,etal. 2008:10).

Recently, many teachers have started using portfolios in all curriculum fields. Portfolios are effective type of the novel educational approaches that emphasize the role of students in constructing information and the role of teachers in promoting student's instruction. Moreover, portfolios can be a tool to improve learner autonomy and an educational instrument to promote life-long language and learning. They can also be used to support cooperative learning and group work by presenting an opportunity for students and pairs to exchange and modify each other's work (Annette, 2008:11).

## **2. 8 The Challenges of Implementing Portfolio Assessments**

Some teachers think portfolios are only suitable for the elementary grades. In fact, using portfolios is very important for teachers at both grades (middle and secondary) it can use successfully at these levels.

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Portfolios may include writing and other projects that offer evidence of students' development, achievement and autonomy learning through self - evaluation process (Burden & Byrd, 2010:284).

Nowadays in learning environment, there are many different educational mediums that can challenge a portfolio using. It may be difficult to contain portfolio a representation of oral communication or reading. Most classes suffer from lack of internet connections which students need to do their educational tasks. The availability of technology is generally the limiting factor for students and teachers looking for implementations of portfolio technique. The ability to incorporate and collect all forms of student works should be considered in the overall designation of work to be incorporated into a portfolio assessment. Another challenge is a lack of knowledge and understanding of teachers in implementing student portfolio technique. Some teachers don't have a clear perception for portfolio using. That may be because they don't have sufficient understanding of the concept portfolio technique or how to use it to record students' progress. So teachers should conduct their professional skills in fulfilling student portfolio technique to achieve learning objectives. Many teachers regard using portfolio technique as a kind of excessive consumption in time and efforts because monitoring process for student s portfolio (Nunan, 2001:83). The other problem regarding financial affairs such as a lack of materials and budgets to enable teachers in implementing student portfolio technique in classroom. Also many difficulties in dealing with individuals from different backgrounds are one of the portfolios problems.

Mc Keachie (1986:184) states that class size is another area of challenge to assess students' progress and using alternative assessment. Nevertheless, overcrowded classes are also less effective for knowledge acquisition, critical, high-order thinking skills, self and peer evaluation. In small classes and group may students have the best chance for effective personal contact with their teacher Moreover, students in small classes have a greater responsibility to learn and evaluation the students in big class size do not learn how to describe their own ideas and to evaluate their progress to share these ideas by communicating.

Many difficulties relater to students themselves such as, a poor attention and understanding of students in implementation the portfolios technique. It is better to create a handbook of portfolio containing stages, examples, and instructional tools necessary for the portfolio using (Stockard & Maybery 1992:47).



### **3. Procedures**

#### **3.1 Population & Sample**

The population refers to “any set of items, individuals, etc. which shares some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken” (Richards. et al, 1992:282). The population of this research comprises Iraqi EFL secondary school teachers. Sampling as defined by Thompson, S., K. (2012:11) is the selecting some part of a population to observe so that one may estimate something about the whole population. Forty English language preparatory school teachers were chosen randomly to represent the main study sample and other twenty teachers represent the pilot administration.

#### **3.2 The Instrument**

To fulfill the aim of this study, which is “Investigating Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Teachers' Difficulties in Implementation of Portfolios”, a questionnaire was formed by the researcher, as shown in table (1.2). The questionnaire type used in this research is a rating scales questionnaire. Richards & Schmidt, (2002: 438) define the questionnaire as “questions on a topic or group of topics designed to be answered by a respondent”.

The items of the questionnaire have been set depending on the related literature, the open ended questionnaire that has been distributed to teachers, interviews, previous studies of the process of teaching large classes and experts views since this questionnaire was assessed by a jury of specialists in ELT.

**(Table 1.2)The List of Questionnaire Items**

No.	Item	Agree	Partially agree	Disagree
1	Portfolios contribute to increase in student achievements.			
2	Portfolios' preparation needs more time.			
3	Portfolios do not give much time to teachers so as to spend on other classroom communicative skills.			
4	Language teachers face difficulties in grading the large amount of students' work, including in portfolio.			
5	Composing portfolios are better as written paper .			
6	E-portfolios are better kept comparing with the written ones.			
7	Portfolios are right place for students' inspiration and reflection.			
8	Alternative assessment uses an portfolio as an			

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	integral part of instruction.			
9	Portfolio gives teachers more space for developing curricula.			
10	Portfolios create students motivational problems.			
11	Using portfolios increase teachers stress and dissatisfaction.			
12	Language teachers suffer from portfolios' organizational problems.			
13	Portfolios have negative effects on practicing effective teaching strategies.			
14	Traditional assessment became more formal, time-consuming, and sometimes delayed in comparison with alternative assessment.			
15	Difficulties in dealing with individuals from different backgrounds are one of the portfolios problems.			
16	Portfolios effect the quality of the learning process.			
17	Emphasizing the skills of high-order learning and critical thinking.			

## 3.4 Face Validity

A test is said to be face valid if it appears to be measuring what it claims to measure. "It is the best type of validity in the case of self rating" (Kline, P. 2013:53).

The questionnaire items, after benign constructed, were submitted to the jury to assess their validity. The selection of the \*Jury members were done on the basis of specialization and experience in the field of education, psychology, and ELT. The jury were requested to point out their remarks and suggestions concerning the suitability of the given questionnaire items. Thus, some items have been excluded and others have been modified. A large number of the jury members have verified the questionnaire items validity. The remaining 17 items have constituted the final version of the questionnaire.

\*The jury of experts were:

- Prof, Satha Alsaadi, University of Baghdad, College of Education for women.
- Asst.Prof. Bushra Al-Noori, PH.D University of Baghdad, College of Education. Ibn Rushd for Human Sciences.

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- Asst. Prof. Maysaa Rasheed , University of Baghdad, College of Education for women/ Department of English.
- Asst. Prof .Huda Hadi, M.A University of Baghdad, College of Education for women/ Department of English.
- Inst . Khnsaa Hasan, PH.D College of AL-Imam AL-Kadhim / Department of English.
- Inst .Liqa'a Habeb Aboud , PH.D University of Diyala , College of Education / Department of English.

## 3.5 Pilot Administration

After constructing a questionnaire items, a pilot study was needed to find out whether the questionnaire is well constructed or not . For the pilot administration, Twenty English language teachers have been chosen randomly from different preparatory schools. The pilot sample has not been included in the sample of the study.

To determine the effectiveness of the items in the light of the subjects' responses, the Results of the pilot administration can be depended upon since they represent the best indicator for making any modifications in the final version of the questionnaire.

## 3.6 Final Administration of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire final version was distributed to the participants at the mid of August 2016.

The teachers were directed to state their points of view on the items according to scale. The distributing and receiving period of the copies of the questionnaire lasted from the mid of August till the mid of September 2016.

## 3.7 Overall Performance

To investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads "Investigating Iraqi EFL Preparatory School Teachers' Difficulties in Implementation of Portfolio Technique" . The subject responses were investigated using the mean and the hypothetical mean formula. The mean score of the subjects was (45.22) compared with the hypothetical mean (34). Results indicated that the hypothetical mean is higher than the theoretical mean. This indicates that Iraqi EFL preparatory school teachers face difficulties in implementation portfolio technique.

*Table (3): Questionnaire Items Weighted Mean*

<i>Item (NO.)</i>	<i>I Agree</i>	<i>I partially agree</i>	<i>I disagree</i>	<i>Weighted Mean</i>
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1	35	5	0	87.5%
2	40	0	0	100%
3	38	2	0	95%
4	31	7	2	77.5%
5	34	6	0	85%
6	28	10	2	70%
7	40	0	0	100%
8	35	3	2	87.5%
9	24	11	5	60%
10	17	11	12	42.5%
11	9	13	18	22.5%
12	28	11	1	70%
13	25	13	2	62.5%
14	18	7	15	45%
15	36	3	1	90%
16	37	3	0	92.5%
17	34	6	0	85%

## 4. Conclusions, Recommendations & Suggestions for Further Research

### 4.1 Conclusions

Presenting teacher's difficulties in the implementation of portfolio technique, throughout the procedures of this research, the analysis of data leads to the following conclusions:

- 1- An alternative to traditional assessment of student progress is portfolio assessment. By using portfolio assessments, students will be able to show a correlation between activities, skills taught and learned over an entire grading level as a continuous process. This is in contrast to the traditional testing that is given at the end of a unit or mid studying period followed by a final examination.
- 2- Alternative assessments give the students the opportunity to create the rang of what they have learned instead of being limited to some answers on a pencil paper test as in traditional exam. If portfolio is made, teachers should supply each student with a folder, then together teacher and student decide what pieces of their work will be kept in it.
- 3-When students are involved in an authentic assessment, they become more active participants and responsible to construct their learning, so an effective portfolio, in which students, teacher and parents are actively engaged in the choosing it's content and new inputs.

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- 4- Teachers should use the different educational techniques to create effective teaching. If electronic media are expensive to some schools, teachers can use real objects, simple maps, and drawings on cards, demonstrations using the learners including sketches on boards, performance tasks according to students needs to prompt alternative assessment which lead to effective lifelong learning.
- 5-Portfolios are effective educational tool with both elementary and preparatory schools levels .Teachers should encourage their students to develop goals for their continues development by the given criteria so students know how they will be graded. In this way, assessments are deeply embedded in the everyday learning of the curriculum.

### **4.2 Recommendations**

Depending on the results achieved and the conclusions derived, the following can be recommended:

- 1-For effective learning, students require good quality of authentic assessment, ongoing feedback, promote students needs. Providing learners with the framework and skills for peer and self-evaluation.
- 2- Alternatives assessment promotes metacognition in learners. It develops a higher thinking skill. Giving students to the best opportunity for developing deeper awareness of how and what they learn.
- 3-Portfolios are right place for students' inspiration and reflection. Alternative assessment uses a portfolio as an integral part of instruction.
- 4- Teachers should create an effective educational environment and using authentic material similar to real life situations in order to improve learning and teaching processes in which the emphasis on high-order outcomes and thinking skills.
- 5- Enhance teachers professional development by engage them in creative workshops for training on the best ways for using portfolio technique, its reasonable goals, characteristics, implantation and collection
- 6-The results of this research reveal that students' assessment can be more effective than traditional pencil-paper testing. Students often involved more actively with their partners and peers. Portfolio technique provides feedback on students' achievement across time to improve their work and performance.

### **4.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

1. The same research can be applied to identify the problems faced by English teachers of using journal in assess students progress.
2. A similar research is needed about Teachers' perception and attitudes of alternative assessment.

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3. A similar study is needed to investigate the difficulties that the English teachers face in the classroom management.

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### **المستخلص**

ليس من السهل تعزيز تعليم عالي الجودة لجميع الناس. ومن أجل توفير الاحتياجات التعليمية لجميع السكان، هناك حاجة إلى بناء وتطوير العديد من المدارس، وتوظيف أعداد كبيرة من المعلمين، وتطوير المناهج التعليمية. ويعتبر "التقييم البديل" هو الخطاب المشترك وله شعبية متزايدة في مجال التعليم. وتستند الفائدة من ممارسات التقييم البديلة على تغييرات كبيرة في ممارسات التقييم. وهناك تقنية محفظة تقييم الطلاب والتي هي نوع من التقييمات البديلة حيث يكون للطلاب فرص لاختيار و تطوير تعلمهم والتي تجعله يفكر بصورة أفضل لتشجيع مهاراتهم في الدراسة وفهم المفاهيم التعليمية.

وهذه التقنية هي عبارة عن عملية هادفة تشمل اختيار وجمع عمل الطلاب من قبل كل من الطالب والمعلم على مر الوقت لمتابعة تطور الطالب خلال السنة الدراسية.

تهدف هذه الدراسة لمعرفة الصعوبات التي تواجه مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية في المدارس الاعدادية في العراق في تطبيق تقنية الطالب التقييمية.

و لتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم وبشكل عشوائي اختيار (40) مدرس لغة انكليزية ومن مختلف المدارس الاعدادية لتكون عينة الدراسة .

استخدمت الباحثة الاستبيان كأداة للقياس وجاءت نتائج البحث لتتطابق فرضياته، مما يعني مواجهة مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية في المدارس الاعدادية صعوبات في تطبيق استخدام تقنية الحافظة التقييمية للطلاب .