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# THE USE OF ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO IN INITIAL LANGUAGE TEACHER TRAINING AS AN ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION TOOL

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**Abstract:** In this study, an electronic portfolio application in initial language teacher training is investigated as an assessment and evaluation form of instrument for the practice course, which is compulsory for the last semester of the initial teacher education program.

**Keywords:** Electronic portfolios, initial language teacher education and practice teaching

## 1. Introduction

In the time of millennium, the societies have been reshaped and introduced reforms to their social, economical and political systems. Through revisiting the existing systems and improvising them, the communities are supposed to have better life conditions, work opportunities and educational qualifications. All these can be put into practice by the strategical planning of educational reforms, the use of technology and adaptation of it to national educational systems. The qualification for redefined standards in education is required when the technology is utilized in education. Current trends such as new technology blended teaching and training, content and language integrated learning through multimedia tools, and alternative technological assessment instruments like e-portfolios have come into use. These trends have brought not only applications but also new responsibilities on teachers and social agencies for developing skills to cope with mass media application in education and to meet learners' needs in individualized context.

While new regulations and standards are enacted, the new challenges that expect much creativeness and a high standard of teaching have appeared as an unavoidable outcome. Present teachers find themselves coping with the changed classroom atmosphere with technology, more diverge group of learners and new policies demanded by national education system. So as to develop the qualification of teachers, the teacher training program has been improvised and hands-on experience has taken the place of passive transfer of knowledge from the supervisor to the teacher candidates. Traditional sense of teacher education refers to training with courses and assessing the knowledge and practice through tests, essay-type exams and observations, which is considered to be "inadequate" to reveal out an accurate extent of teachers' competency. In the modern sense of initial teacher education, the technological applications are welcomed and the integration of technology into initial teacher education is accelerated so that the growth of pre-service students' skills, knowledge and attitudes toward teaching can be monitored on the basis of progressive development and the quality of teacher training system can be better. The instrument for such teacher education is the use of e-portfolio. Several studies mention this kind of application in terms of professional development and gains of skills through new learning opportunities. In her study, Barlett (2000:1) state that "each stage of the portfolio development process contributes to teachers' professional development and students' lifelong learning". Barrett and Knezek (2003) indicate that the use of electronic portfolio in teacher education serves to the aim of securing evidence of professional and personal growth, progression, and mastery of expected outcomes from the teacher education programmes. For the general use of e-portfolios in teacher education, Wood and Nanlohy (2004) also underline that use of e-portfolio could provide "new learning opportunities" by giving choice and variety in terms of the organization, presentation and documentation of the learnt items. They conclude that in regard with new opportunities, technical skills and understanding through e-portfolios has been helpful in presenting the learners' knowledge.

The present study is done after the revision of the benefits of e-portfolio implementation in teacher training and aims to seek a possible way of e-portfolio application in initial language teacher education. The following sections explain how the research practice is done.

## **2. E-Portfolio Application in Initial Teacher Training Education**

This study is designed for twenty two pre-service students who were majoring in the Department of Foreign Language Education at Mersin University, Turkey in the academic year 2006-2007. The design is created in order to help language teacher candidates gain hands-on experiences in creating and developing e-portfolios in their practical teaching course. The aim of the course is to provide teacher candidates with opportunities for practice teaching before they are qualified as a teacher candidate. While they have such a practice opportunity, the e-portfolio application is added to the curriculum of the initial teaching program for the fact that during the practice teaching period, the teacher candidates cannot only gain skills for using technology in their education but also monitor their own professional development through progressive evaluation.

For the beginning of the 2007 spring term, the course outline and the e-portfolio application process were explained to the pre-service students. They were required to participate in the workshop which was taken place in the computer lab and an educational technologist from the same university together with the researcher explained how to create e-portfolio through a free online tool called *google page creator*. This tool was particularly selected as it is free and user friendly. The steps below were followed.

- The pre-service students were asked to have an account with anonymous name or nicknames they like.
- After that, they were asked to create pages for brief information about who they were, tasks that they were required to complete for practice teaching and their optional preference such as links, academic journals, etc. Under the task page, the students opened up a space for Lesson Preparation (P), Self-evaluation (S), Mentor's Feedback (MF) and Peer Feedback (PF). For the lesson preparation, an outline for what the pre-service students were expected to do in the state school they would do practice teaching was distributed. For the first two weeks, they were asked to fill in the checklists for the classroom teacher and write an evaluation for the teacher. For the rest of the weeks, they were asked to prepare a skill-based lesson plan with teaching activities. For the last two weeks in the schedule, pre-service students prepared grammar and art craft lessons respectively. They organized their space according to the schedule given.
- Pre-service students were assisted to create their own e-portfolios during the workshop. The educational technologist and the researcher first showed how to do it via OHP and then went to each student's place in order to check if they needed help.
- When finished creating e-portfolios in the workshop, the pre-service students were told to upload related files and publish them for their supervisors to review right after they had done their practice teaching for that week in the schedule. The office hours were specified for the consultation and feedback.

Samples for homepage and task display are given below. The pre-service teacher candidates publish their artifacts through such e-portfolios created.



etc. Moreover, they were willing to use this experience in the future for assessing the students' performance in English classes through e-portfolios. Almost all of them (20 out of 22) stated that the application made them be aware of each step in their teaching practice and the published self evaluation task made them voice out for how they felt about their own teaching. Most of them (18 out of 22) found the overall process very beneficial for gaining practice in the use of technology, and efficient for self monitoring over their performance in teaching practice. This implementation was found to have a major drawback which was lack of an interactive feedback tool in the e- portfolios. The *google page creator* as a free product does not include a component for giving interactive feedback between the supervisors, the pre-service students and their peers. The implementation could have been better if the interactive tool had been added so that the feedback could be more efficient than merely publishing the mentors' feedback. By this way, the review and feedback session could be immediate and autonomous in a sense that the feedback is published when submitted online and without the pre-service student's responsibility to publish it.

As a consequence, the use of e-portfolio in initial language teacher education is possible with various online tools like *google page creator* and it is efficient in order to show the integration of technology into the initial language teacher education so that the teacher candidates can have hands-on practice and experience for their teaching in the future. Additionally, this implementation can afford the candidates with awareness in being reflective during the practice teaching plus technical qualifications at the stages of e-portfolio development. This study supports the studies which advocate for using e-portfolios in teacher education and highlights the feasibility of the e-portfolio implementation in language teacher education.

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