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Portfolio Assessment in the English Teaching Program at the UCR, Western Campus

Los portafolios como estrategia de evaluación en la carrera de enseñanza del inglés en la UCR, SO

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Abstract

Portfolios have been used as an assessment strategy for around four decades. Today, they continue to be relevant forms of assessment in different fields of education including EFL writing. Following a convergent mixed methods approach under the pragmatic worldview, this study investigated the extent to which portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the Bachelor's in English Teaching (BET) program at UCR, West Campus brings into line theoretical principles of portfolio assessment. The data consisted of a set of six teacher-created portfolio guidelines which were analyzed using a theory-based checklist and the information collected via a teachers' questionnaire that the six participant teachers in the study answered. Despite evidence of a high level of knowledge about theoretical principles of writing portfolio assessment on the part of the participant teachers, the results indicated a clear mismatch between such knowledge and the actual implementation of writing portfolios by the participants. Based on these results, it was suggested that participant teachers undergo specialized training on the implementation of writing portfolio assessment to assist them in closing the gap between writing portfolio assessment theory and their actual implementation in EFL writing courses of the BET program at UCR, West Campus.
Key terms: portfolio assessment, writing portfolio, portfolio, assessment, writing assessment

Resumen

Los portafolios han sido utilizados como estrategia evaluativa por cerca de cuatro décadas. Actualmente siguen siendo alternativas de evaluación relevantes en diferentes campos de la educación incluyendo el área de la escritura en lenguas extranjeras. Siguiendo una metodología convergente de enfoque mixto bajo el paradigma pragmático, el presente estudio investigó el grado de convergencia entre el uso de los portafolios como estrategia evaluativa en los cursos de escritura en la carrera de la enseñanza del inglés en la UCR, Sede de Occidente y los principios teóricos de evaluación mediante portafolios. Los datos analizados fueron seis guías para la preparación de portafolios creadas por los docentes participantes las cuales fueron analizados mediante el uso de una lista de cotejo creada según principios teóricos y la información proveniente de los cuestionarios que seis profesores respondieron. A pesar de que se encontró evidencia de que los participantes poseen altos niveles de conocimiento sobre el uso de los portafolios como herramienta de evaluación en la escritura a nivel teórico, los resultados indican una clara discrepancia entre el conocimiento teórico que poseen los docentes y la implementación de los portafolios como estrategia de evaluación en cursos de escritura por parte de los profesores. Con base en estos resultados, se sugirió la necesidad de capacitar a los docentes participantes en la implementación de portafolios como estrategia de evaluación de la escritura, de modo que se les pueda ayudar a cerrar la brecha entre la teoría sobre el uso de los portafolios como estrategia de evaluación y su implementación en cursos de escritura de inglés como lengua extranjera en la carrera de enseñanza del inglés en la UCR, Se de Occidente.
Palabras clave: portafolios, evaluación por portafolio, portafolios en la escritura, evaluación, evaluación de la escritura

I. Introduction

The use of portfolios as an assessment strategy has been around for several decades now. According to Lam (2018), portfolio assessment has been used since the late 1980s. After these many years of use, portfolio assessment continues to be relevant in the educational arena. Its use as an assessment instrument extends to diverse disciplines and subjects including ESL and EFL writing. Hence, portfolio assessment is an evaluation strategy often implemented in the Bachelor's in English Teaching (BET) program at the University of Costa Rica (UCR), Western Campus. Within this context, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the extent to which portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the BET at UCR, Western Campus brings into line theoretical principles of portfolio assessment.

II. Theoretical considerations

History of writing portfolio assessment

Pat Belanoff and Peter Elbow are credited for having introduced portfolio assessment at Brook University of New York in 1983 (Williams, 2020). Williams (2020) makes the claim that because during the 70s and 80s attention turned toward direct measures of writing, there was a need to examine actual samples of student writing to assess and evaluate writing performance. She attests that portfolios saw light as a response to those needs. Furthermore, Lam (2018) argues that "portfolio assessment has remained an up-and-coming assessment trend since late 1980s" (p. 4). He also describes the birth of portfolio assessment in the US as an alternative to essay-based assessments while in the UK its origin is connected to its use as a replacement of other types of assessment methods. Thus, portfolio assessment has a history of close to forty years now.

Writing portfolios

Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) define portfolios as "a purposeful collection of pieces of student work" (p. 289). They claim that portfolios "should be a student self-portrait that has benefited from guidance and feedback from the teacher and sometimes other students" (p.289). Three elements merit attention in this definition. First, the claim that portfolios need to be purposeful. This means that portfolios not only need to have a clear assessment purpose but also a learning one as well. Second, portfolios need to be a guided endeavor. Teachers should provide learners with thorough guidance for portfolios to be successful tools of assessment and learning. Third, feedback plays a paramount role in portfolio assessment because it can enhance learner reflection that translates into learning. Furthermore, Martin-Kniep (1999) concords that portfolios are collections of "purposeful and specialized work [that] validate current expectations and legitimize future goals" (p. 3). Thus, the great potential of portfolios to direct learning by contributing to goal setting is made evident. Likewise, Lam (2018), states that "the idea of portfolios refers to a collection of purposeful and meaningful artifacts which characterizes a person's efforts, professional growth and achievements" (p. 1). He describes portfolios further as he explains: "portfolios are running records for learners to review, reflect and improve their works-in-progress" (p. 2). Moreover, Lee (2017) proposes another important dimension of portfolios as she asserts that portfolios are grounded on constructivist theory of learning, and assessment via portfolios which is in line with principles of assessment or as learning. As it has been shown, recurrent in all definitions of portfolios is the idea of purposefulness and learner samples of work that offer a portrayal of where they are and who they are as learners from a constructivist standpoint.

Writing portfolios as assessment

Writing portfolios have been defined from different perspectives. For example, Carrol (1999) argues that "writing portfolios provide evidence of a student's ability in writing, a student's progress in writing and perhaps a student's future goal in writing" (p. 120). This perspective focuses on a vision of portfolios that makes it possible to verify writing competence, a dimension of portfolios best described as writing assessment. In discussing this use of writing portfolios, Lam (2018) states that "writing portfolio assessment refers to a systematic collection of learners written works for informing teaching, learning and assessment of writing in a specific language curriculum" (p.3). Furthermore, he proposes that portfolio assessment has been described as featuring "learner agency and reflective practices [by which] students are encouraged to self-evaluate their writing performances following an individualized assessment paradigm which promotes autonomy and self-efficacy" (p. 4). These assertions pose a constructivist vision of writing portfolio assessment in which the learner is given a central role.

Types of writing portfolios

The different types of portfolios depend on the purpose established and on the audiences for which they will be used (Klenowski, 2002). Lam (2018) lists three types of portfolio assessment: progress portfolios which compile several artifacts where learners can review their learning progress in a stable manner; working portfolios where students can put finished or unfinished work by which they can demonstrate attainment of learning goals; and showcase portfolios which feature collections of students best works to speak for their academic achievements. Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) in turn, identify five types of portfolios based on the purpose for which they are used. The first type is instruction portfolios which help students "refine self-evaluation". The second type is assessment portfolios which are divided into portfolios used for formative purposes and portfolios used for summative purposes. The third type is portfolios as current accomplishments and progress. When they are used as accomplishment, portfolios include only finished work and usually cover a short period of time. If they are used as progress, they cover a longer timeframe and several versions of a piece or writing. Showcase and documentation portfolios is the fourth type. The showcase portfolio is said to include student-selected pieces while the documentation portfolio offers evidence of both breadth and depth of learning. The fifth type is finished and working portfolios which include complete work and work that is expected to evolve, respectively. Here, the latter type is highly appropriate for use with formative evaluation purposes.

Benefits and limitations of writing portfolio assessment

The benefits of portfolio assessment to evaluate writing skills are many but there are also limitations to consider. According to Lam (2018), among the benefits of portfolio assessment are the following: it allows teachers to make sound professional judgements in portfolio-based programs; portfolio-based pedagogy enables teachers to monitor and accommodate student's needs when they are undergoing difficulties in writing; and portfolio allows bringing the student to the center of the teaching-learning process in the context of portfolio construction while the teacher remains a co-participant. Along the same lines, Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) describe these benefits of writing portfolios: they can be integrated with instruction; they allow students to show what they can do; they have the potential to encourage students to reflect and become skillful in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their work; portfolios help learners become responsible in setting goals and evaluating their progress; they enable teacher-student collaboration; they are an effective way to communicate with parents by showing them samples of student work; they are a good way to create student-centered conferences with parents;

and portfolios can give parents evidence of student development over time and their current skills.

Regarding the weaknesses of portfolios, Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) list four: 1) portfolios can be time-consuming to assemble. 2) They are also time-consuming for teachers since constructive feedback and guidance need to be provided to students. 3) Low reliability of portfolios becomes a problem when they are used for summative evaluation. 4) People naively tend to believe that portfolios are easy to create. In like manner, Seifert (2011) describes these disadvantages of portfolio assessment: 1) Portfolio use takes a great amount of time and organization on the part of the teacher since they need to help learners in understanding the purpose and structure of the portfolio. 2) the evaluation of portfolio reliability and the elimination of bias in them can be more difficult than in constructed response assessments. Thus, when considering the use of portfolios as a writing assessment strategy, teachers need to not just focus on the advantages, but be aware that portfolio assessment does not come without some challenges.

Considerations for the creation of writing portfolio assessment

It is important that teachers have a clear understanding of the procedures to be followed in the creation of writing portfolio assessment. Rolheiser, Bower, and Stevhan (2000) indicate that "it is important for educators to be clear about their goals, the reasons they are engaging in a portfolio project, and the intended audience for the portfolios" (p. 3-4). Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) advise that specifying the purpose of the portfolio does not make enough guidance for students. They call for the specification of clear guidelines. According to them, "at a minimum, guidelines should specify (a) the uses that will be made of the portfolio, (b) who will have access to it, (c) what types of work are appropriate to include, and (d) what criteria will be used in evaluating the work" (p. 296). Other guidelines suggested by Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) include stating whether the student needs to work individually or with others, specifying a timeline for the portfolio, indicating the number and type of entries needed, explaining the physical structure of the portfolio, and stating the weight the portfolio has on the course total grade. Moreover, Seifert (2011), based on Popham (2005), proposes a series of steps to follow when using portfolios in the classroom. These considerations are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Steps in implementing a classroom portfolio program

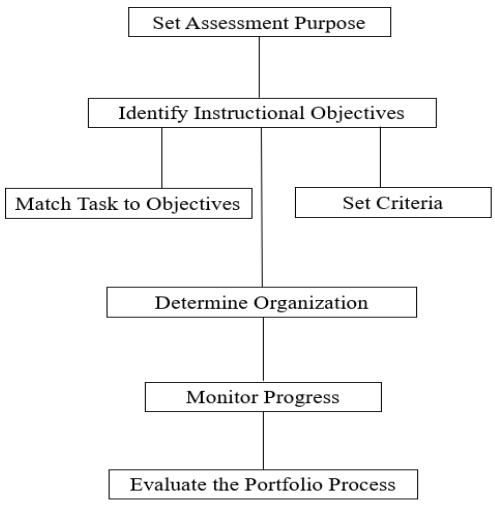
1. Make sure students own their portfolios.	Talk to your students about your ideas for the portfolio, the different purposes, and the variety of work samples. If possible, have them help make decisions about the kind of portfolio you implement.
2. Decide on the purpose.	Will the focus be on growth or current accomplishments? Best work showcase or documentation? Good portfolios can have multiple purposes but the teacher and students need to be clear about the purpose.
3. Decide what work samples to collect.	For example, in writing, is every writing assignment included? Are early drafts as well as final products included?
4. Collect and store work samples.	Decide where the work sample will be stored. For example, will each student have a file folder in a file cabinet, or a small plastic tub on a shelf in the classroom?
5. Select criteria to evaluate samples.	If possible, work with students to develop scoring rubrics. This may take considerable time as different rubrics may be needed for the variety of work samples. If you are using existing scoring rubrics, discuss with students possible modifications after the rubrics have been used at least once.
6. Teach and require students to conduct self-evaluations of their own work.	Help students learn to evaluate their own work using agreed-upon criteria. For younger students, the self-evaluations may be simple (strengths, weaknesses, and ways to improve); for older students, a more analytic approach is desirable including using the same scoring rubrics that the teachers will use.

7. Schedule and conduct portfolio conferences.	Teacher-student conferences are time-consuming, but conferences are essential for the portfolio process to significantly enhance learning. These conferences should aid students' self-evaluation and should take place frequently.
8. Involve parents.	Parents need to understand the portfolio process. Encourage parents to review the work samples. You may wish to schedule parent, teacher-student conferences in which students talk about their work samples.

Notr: Seifert (2011)

Finally, Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001) proposed a framework for portfolio assessment (see figure 1 below) that "offers foreign language teachers a model for systematically designing and implementing assessment portfolios" (p. 559). The framework features a series of guidelines for teachers to make technical decisions necessary for the development and implementation of portfolio assessment. The guidelines are summarized as follows: 1) set the purpose, 2) identify clear objectives, 3) match task and objectives, 4) establish meaningful criteria for portfolio assessment, 5) determine portfolio contents and organization, 6) monitor progress, and 7) evaluate the process.

Figure 1.
Framework for portfolio assessment



Note: Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001)

As illustrated, the considerations for the creation and implementation of writing portfolio assessments are many, but certainly worth observing to ensure that portfolios can be a success for both, the teachers, and the learners. Arguably, because of this, specialized training on portfolio assessment is a must-have for teachers who contemplate the use of portfolio assessment in their classes.

Principles for the scoring of portfolios

It is important for teachers using portfolio assessment to have clear information regarding the procedures and methods for the scoring of writing portfolios. To begin with, Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) advise that teachers need to be clear regarding the instructional goals for both, individual portfolio entries and the whole portfolio. They recommend that "the evaluation criteria should clarify instructional goals not only for the teacher but for students and parents as well" (p.307). Also, to enhance fairness, the specification of evaluation criteria should be readily available to students. Besides, scoring rubrics are recommended for the purpose of evaluating portfolios. Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) state that analytic scoring rubrics are good for formative purposes while holistic scoring rubrics are appropriate for summative purposes. Furthermore, Johnson, Mims-Cox, and Doyle-Nichols (2010) highlight the need to establish scoring guidelines to achieve agreement and consistency in evaluating the portfolio contents" (p. 102). They speak of the importance that students understand the common strategies used in the scoring of portfolios for them to be more at ease with it. Along the same lines, Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001) recommend that before portfolio implementation, teachers and students need to develop criteria to assess portfolio entries as well as the portfolio as a whole. They also argue that "the portfolio measures progress towards goals by using a consistent system of assessment" (p. 564) and propose rubrics and rating scales to attain such consistency. All in all, clear portfolio scoring procedures need to be determined and they need

to be communicated to learners who should also be given the chance to participate in the creation of portfolio assessment criteria. This would enhance consistency and transparency in portfolio scoring.

Empirical studies on the implementation of writing portfolios

Previous empirical studies concerning the implementation of writing portfolio assessment have recommended the implementation of practices that help learners put together their portfolios and have called attention to some gaps in teacher knowledge of portfolio assessment and implementation. For starters, Etheridge (2006) conducted an inquiry-based study of portfolio assessment use in postsecondary English programs at 14 US colleges to assess their influence on student knowledge and skills as well as on departmental practices. She was able to identify the uses given to portfolio assessment which include pre-placement and placement of Freshmen English as an exit examination from Freshman English and for assessment of the departmental program. She also found that 99% of the participants were not able to appropriately define portfolios. Based on her results, she articulated a set of recommendations for portfolio development and research summarized as follows: formulation, articulation, and publishing of course objectives and learning outcomes for freshman composition; affordance of active student involvement in determining standards of performance; faculty involvement across disciplines to establish program policies to promote collegiality; design of studies that impact on departmental goals and longitudinal studies to determine the effectiveness of portfolio-based writing assessment; and assessment and evaluation of such studies to improve portfolio content and process. Moreover, through a qualitative survey-based study, Caldwell (2007) investigated the perceptions of 10 teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools in southern Wisconsin about portfolio development, implementation, and assessment focusing on students with disabilities. The participants were inquired about knowledge, development, and implementation of portfolios; portfolio effectiveness as an educational tool and their influence on institutional practices; portfolio legitimacy as an alternative assessment; and student roles and responsibilities in portfolio development. Her conclusions were that participant teachers were knowledgeable of portfolios; most teachers liked teaching with portfolios and perceived portfolio benefits to student learning and assessment, while students enjoyed portfolios. She also identified teacher concerns about the amount of time invested in preparing portfolios and the accurate grading of portfolio evaluations. Furthermore, Kiliç (2009) looked at portfolio implementation and the aims of portfolio used reported by schools in Turkish university preparatory schools. This research also investigated the problems teachers experienced with portfolio use, the sources for those problems, and suggestions on how to improve portfolio use. This survey-based study included the participation of 126 teachers. Some of the results indicated that key features of portfolios, including "student participation in the selection of portfolio content, self-assessment, and student reflection, are not generally included in preparatory programs" [*sic*] (p. iv). The study also reported a call for portfolio training on the part of participant teachers which the researcher recommended not just for teachers but also for administrators. In addition, Lam and Lee (2010) conducted a study in Hong Kong to study the formative functions of portfolio assessment and how these formative functions can best be used in the EFL writing classroom. Their survey-based research allowed them to propose a series of recommendations to strengthen formative aspects of portfolio assessment and for the integration of teaching and assessment so that student learning of writing can be benefited. These recommendations are listed next. First, the promotion of learner choice in portfolio assessment to "help students develop a greater sense of ownership as well as autonomy in learning" (p. 62). Second, the provision of supportive learning environments which include ongoing teacher feedback, peer review, and conferencing in opposition to traditional writing assessment

where students work in isolation. Third, the change in students' attitudes about the primacy of grades since "grades could distract students from key issues in writing" (p.62). Fourth, the provision of teacher training in portfolio assessment was recommended so it "can become an important part of their pedagogical repertoire" (p. 62). They concluded by emphasizing that summative assessment and formative assessment do not conflict with each other since "the formative aspects of portfolio-based classroom can render summative grades more meaningful by making students understand their strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to improve their writing" (p. 62). Conclusively, a common theme in the conclusions of the studies reviewed is the listing of recommendations for the enactment of portfolios. Some of the recommendations are aimed at teachers so they implement certain practices that will aid students in putting together effective portfolios. Other recommendations focus on the need for attending to some gaps in teacher knowledge of portfolio assessment and implementation. That is, the need for teacher training on portfolio assessment.

III. Methodology

The main question the present study sought to answer was the extent to which portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the English teaching program at the University of Costa Rica, Western Campus aligns with the theoretical principles of portfolio assessment. Other research questions were also addressed, namely: What are the portfolio assessment procedures in the Bachelors in English Teaching program at the University of Costa Rica, Western Campus? How do these portfolio assessment procedures align with tenets of portfolio assessment theory? And how do the BET teachers' beliefs about portfolio assessment line up with principles of portfolio assessment theory?

The world view assumed to frame the present research endeavor is the pragmatic one because the ultimate intention of the study is to inquire about the ways writing portfolio assessment is being conducted in the BET at UCR, Western Campus for the purpose of providing useful information for program transformation and as a consequence, student writing skills enhancement (Creswell and Creswell 2018).

In terms of the research approach, because both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed at the same time, the study followed a research methodology described by Creswell and Creswell (2018) as the convergent mixed methods approach. Meanwhile, the use of the convergent mixed methods approach made it possible to merge quantitative and qualitative data to build a comprehensive analysis of the research problem.

The study was conducted at the University of Costa Rica, Western Campus. The UCR offers degrees ranging from bachelors to doctorate in fields as diverse as the health sciences, the natural sciences, and the social sciences, amongst others. The study was carried out in the Bachelors in English Teaching program. This is a four-year program that trains pre-service secondary school English teachers. The BET includes four English writing courses which train students in writing skills from the paragraph to the essay level.

The participants for the study were chosen following the non-probability sampling approach known as convenience sampling (Etikan 2016). Thus, six BET faculty members teaching the writings courses in the program participated by sharing guidelines they have used for writing portfolio assessment and by filling out the teacher questionnaire. The participants are well-trained professionals holding master's degrees in English Teaching. Their levels of experience in teaching writing courses varies. Finally, all participants speak English as their second language (L2).

Two instruments were used during the data collection process and the data analysis stage of the study. First, the faculty teaching the writing courses

and using portfolio assessment in the BET at UCR, Western Campus filled out a teachers' questionnaire (Appendix 1). The questionnaire enquired about teachers' beliefs and practices when implementing portfolio assessment in the writing courses. The second instrument is a theory-based checklist (Appendix 2) that was used to evaluate portfolio assessments constructed by the participants for their compliance with theoretical principles of portfolio assessment. The checklist was created by the researcher based on the theoretical principles described earlier in this paper.

The data for this study come from two sources. The first data source was the participants. Data were obtained via the teachers' questionnaire. The second basis of data was the portfolio guidelines constructed by the participants and used in the writing courses they teach in the BET.

The analysis of the data included the following steps. First, the data resulting from the assessment of the teacher-provided portfolio guidelines were tabulated and analyzed. Second, the quantitative data extracted from the teacher questionnaire were tabulated and interpreted. Third, patterns in the data were identified and analyzed for the qualitative data obtained via the open questions in the teachers' questionnaire. Fourth, findings resulting from the different data sources were discussed considering theoretical principles of portfolio assessment and previous studies relevant to the topic at stake. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the discussion of the findings.

Validity in the present study was ensured by two means. First, data were gathered via two methods: teachers' questionnaires and the collection of writing portfolio assessment guidelines created by the participant teachers. Also, the teachers' questionnaires were piloted, and peer-reviewed to safeguard validity. The other way validity was guaranteed was by triangulating the data obtained via the various data collection methods. Reliability, in turn, was achieved by adhering to strict research protocols during the design of the study, the creation of data collection instruments, the selection of participants, the gathering of data, and the analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

IV. Findings and Discussion

As stated earlier, the teacher portfolio guidelines designed by the six participants in the study were analyzed by using a portfolio guidelines checklist created by the researcher based on the theoretical considerations presented above. The findings of such an analysis reveal that there are nine out of the thirteen criteria considered in the teacher portfolio guidelines checklist with which half or more of the participants' writing portfolio guidelines do not comply. Participant teachers mostly failed to include in their writing portfolio guidelines information about the purpose of the portfolio, the uses that would be given to the portfolios, who would have access to the portfolios, specifications of the type of work to be included in the portfolio, how the portfolio would be evaluated, the inclusion of a scoring rubric, indications regarding whether students needed to work alone or with peers, timelines, and explanations of the physical characteristics of the portfolio. In contrast, it was found that the participant teacher portfolio guidelines were strong in the inclusion of mandatory aspects such as the indication of the number of entries required, the description of the type of entries that the portfolio should include, the indications of the weight the portfolio has in the course grade, and the reflective nature of the portfolio. These findings suggest a partial gap between the participant teacher's knowledge of theoretical considerations that inform the creation of writing portfolio guidelines and their application of writing portfolios. Such indications were corroborated by examining the results of the analysis of the writing portfolio assessment teachers' questionnaire that the participants responded which is presented in the forthcoming section.

Writing portfolio assessment teachers' questionnaire

It must be noted that while six participant teachers shared their portfolio guidelines, only five of them responded the writing portfolio assessment teachers' questionnaire. The findings revealed that all participants hold masters as their higher academic degrees. Besides, the participants' teaching experience ranges between six and twenty-one years with most of the teachers having been active in the teaching profession for more than eleven years. This implies that participants are highly educated and experienced teachers.

In terms of experience in the teaching of writing, the findings showed that the participants' experience ranges between one and fifteen years. Most of the participant teachers' writing experience is situated in the six to ten range, however. It follows that the participants, as a whole, have more experience in teaching other language skills than writing; nevertheless, their experience in teaching writing is substantial.

Part two of the teachers' questionnaire asked participants to judge the importance of the inclusion of twelve directive items in the portfolio guidelines that students receive by ranking them as not important, a little important, important, or very important. It should be highlighted that the items in the list echo the ones in the writing portfolio guidelines checklist used to assess the portfolio guidelines the participant teacher provided for this study (see Portfolio Guidelines Checklist section above). The findings evidence that all the items in the list were marked as either important or very important. Also, participants tended to mostly mark the items as very important. Therefore, the number of "important" marks was the lowest. There was an item that did not get any "important" mark. This means that the participant teachers regard the communication of portfolio directives in the portfolio guidelines to students as very important.

The participants were also asked to identify the purposes they gave the writing portfolios they used as assessment. The purpose that got the most hits was the use of portfolios to gather evidence of current accomplishment and progress while the one with the lowest number of marks was the use of portfolios as evidence of finished products. The differences in the number of marks that the other purposes (instructional portfolio use, portfolios as showcase and documentation, and portfolios as working product) got were small, however. This implies that participant teachers consider a variety of purposes congruent with those suggested in the theory (Miller, Linn, and Gronlund, 2010) as relevant when implementing portfolio assessment.

To ensure anonymity of the participants and to facilitate reference in the presentation of the findings from the analysis of the questions in part three of the teachers' questionnaire, reference codes have been created. In the chart below, the first column depicts the participants of the study; the second one shows the data source; and the third one, the code used to refer to each participant where PG stands for portfolio guidelines, P for participant, and the number refers to the number of the participant in the study.

Chart 1.
Participants reference codes

Participant Number	Source	Codes
01	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P01
02	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P02
03	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P03
04	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P04
05	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P05
06	Portfolio guidelines	PG-P06

Note: Researcher's own design

With regards to the participants' prior training in portfolio assessment, the findings show that three of them learned about portfolio assessment in courses

in their master's programs (PG-001, PG-04, and PG-05) while two of them had received informal training on portfolio assessment by attending workshops and conferences (PG-02 and PG-04). Another one of the participants reported having been exposed to portfolio assessment in a methodology class (PG-P03), and yet another one has acquired knowledge of portfolio assessment by conducting research on assessment (PG-05). The last participant has gained experience in portfolio assessment by teaching a class on assessment where it is part of the content. Two implications can be drawn from these findings. On the one hand, the sources of the participants' knowledge about portfolio assessment are multiple, and on the other, that participants do possess training in writing portfolio assessment.

Participants also listed the advantages of portfolios based on their experience in using writing portfolio assessment in their classes. The first advantage the participants identified for portfolio assessment is its potential to promote learner reflection (PG-01 and PG-05). A second advantage is the opportunities that portfolio assessment affords for the documentation of the pupils' progress (PG-P01 and PG-P06). Another benefit reported by PG-P01 is that portfolios provide evidence of student achievement. The opportunities that portfolio assessment creates for feedback and authentic language use were reported by PG-P03 and PG-P05 respectively. Yet another plus of portfolio assessment, according to PG-06, is the chance for skill integration on the part of the learners that portfolios create. The last advantages of portfolio assessment reported are the enhancement of critical skills described by PG-P04 and the possibilities that portfolios create for self-assessment on the part of students (PG-P02). From the information presented, it can be inferred that the participant teachers value writing portfolio assessment since they acknowledge a number of advantages for portfolios.

Disadvantages of writing portfolio assessment use were also reported by the participant teachers. First, according to PG-P04, if portfolios are not used correctly, they can be regarded as difficult to grade by the instructor, and they can become tedious and repetitive for students. Second, PG-P05 asserted that portfolios are time-consuming for teachers and students, they require special training for teachers, and portfolios "may be frowned upon by faculty not acquainted with their nature, advantages and implication" [*sic*]. Third, PG-P02 reported that portfolios require a lot of organization on the part of teachers and students, and some students do not see the value of portfolios and may just put together everything that goes in the portfolio on the eve of the deadline. Also, "in academic settings where tests are considered the best way to assess progress and products, the value of portfolios is sometimes downlooked by departments and teachers" [*sic*] (PG-P02). Forth, PG-01agreed with PG-05 when asserting that portfolios are time-consuming for teachers and went on to state that some students would just include documents in the portfolio without undertaking reflection. Finally, PG-P03 did not identify any disadvantages for portfolios. In general, these findings evidence sound awareness on the part of the participant teachers regarding the limitations that the use of writing portfolio assessment might entail which confirms the possession of informed knowledge of portfolio assessment by the participants.

In terms of the role students should have in selecting the writing portfolio entries, participants proposed that teachers determine the purpose but that students should have a say in the choosing of the entries since they are in a better position to decide which entries best describe their level of achievement (PG-P01). PG-P02 agrees with PG-P01 and adds that giving students a say in the choosing of entries for the portfolio would allow for a more intuitive analysis of their portfolio. PG-P05 also concords with PG-01 in that teachers should give learners the baselines for the creation of their portfolio. Finally, in PG-P04's opinion teachers should have the largest amount of control in the development of portfolios, but when it comes to reflection, students should have the choice of what to focus on. Implications for these findings are that the participants in the

study understand the negotiated nature of writing portfolio assessment since they recognize the active participation of both teachers and students in the development of portfolios is central to the success of such an assessment.

Regarding the use the participants give to portfolios, it should be noted that one of the participants did not provide any information for this question, the other participants' answers are as follows. PG-P04 informed using portfolios to support essay writing and mainly as an assessment method while PG-P03 reported using portfolios as a source for learner feedback on the part of the teacher and peers. PG-P02 in turn, manifested using portfolios with formative purposes. Lastly, PG-01 has used portfolios as documentation and reflection but advocates other uses for the future. The findings presented suggest limited knowledge regarding portfolio use by the participants. Being this the only one aspect of portfolio assessment in which participants seemed to possess the lowest level of knowledge.

When it came to determining the role that reflection plays in the use of writing portfolios, all participants agreed that reflection is central to writing portfolio assessment. To illustrate, PG-P0 reported that "Without student reflection, the portfolio would be a compilation of student work" [*sic*]. Likewise, PG- P05 stated that reflection is "actually the core of it all". PG-004 proposed that "reflection should have a greater role in the assessment of the entry than the compilation of work" [*sic*]. Lastly, PG-P02 affirmed that the role of reflection is vital in portfolio assessment. Thus, it can be interpreted that participant teachers allocate a central role to reflection in writing portfolio assessment.

The participants' position regarding the role of feedback in writing portfolio assessment is that it is necessary and important. However, they argued that feedback should be timely and should not interfere with student reflection. For example, PG-P02 stated, "It is very important, not only when students present their final version, but also through the process of the portfolio construction" [*sic*]. Also, PG-005 attested "Feedback should be pertinent, timely, and deep" [*sic*]. Finally, PG-04 argued: "the feedback of the instructor should not interfere with the reflection process as it can hinder the objective of developing awareness" [*sic*]. These findings show that the participant teachers are great supporters of feedback in writing portfolio assessment, but they establish a certain restriction for feedback delivery on the part of the teacher.

Discussion

As stated earlier, the aim of the present study was to investigate the extent to which portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the BET program at UCR, Western Campus aligns with theoretical principles of portfolio assessment. Evidence from the findings suggest discrepancies between the knowledge the participants have of the theory about portfolio assessment and their current practices of writing portfolio assessment. This is illustrated by the fact that the participant's portfolio guidelines failed to fully comply with a significant number of the guidelines suggested in the theory (Miller, Linn, and Gronlund, 2010; Seifert, 2011; Rolheiser, Bower, and Stevhan, 2000; and Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian, 2001). This allowed identifying a partial gap in the application of theoretical considerations that inform the creation of writing portfolio guidelines on the part of the participants which is particularly intriguing because of two reasons. First, participants in the study were identified to be highly educated and experienced teachers. Also, even though the participants, in general, have more experience in teaching other language skills than writing, their experience in teaching writing is considerable. Second, the participants in the study demonstrated to be knowledgeable of the principles that inform writing portfolio assessment. For example, findings show that the participants regard the communication of portfolio directives in the portfolio guidelines to students as very important and consider a variety of purposes congruent with

those suggested by Rolheiser, Bower, and Stevhan (2000); and Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010) as pertinent when implementing portfolio assessment. Along the same lines, participants were found to possess fair amounts of training in writing portfolio assessment. Furthermore, the participant teachers see the value of writing portfolio assessment, as they have reported advantages for portfolio use that are coherent with those proposed by Lam (2018), and Miller, Linn, and Gronlund (2010). Further evidence of the participants' high knowledge of portfolio assessment principles is that the findings corroborate sound awareness on the part of the participant teachers of the limitations that the use or writing portfolio assessment might entail which are in line with those described in the literature (Seifert, 2011; Schlepphege 2010). Besides, the participants understand the negotiated nature of writing portfolio assessment since the active participation of both teachers and students in the development of portfolios, including the establishment of evaluation criteria, is central to the success of such an assessment which parallels recommendations by Delett, Barnhardt, and Kevorkian (2001). Also, the participant teachers were found to allocate a central role to reflection in writing portfolio assessment. In like manner, they are great supporters of feedback in writing portfolio assessment which echoes recommendations regarding the use of portfolios by Lam (2018), and Seifert (2011). Finally, this analysis illustrates that the participant teachers' knowledge of portfolio assessment theory is highly consistent with principles of portfolio assessment described in the literature and referred to elsewhere in this paper while their implementation of portfolios as an assessment tool exhibits clear flaws as demonstrated above.

Furthermore, the findings in the present study both contrast and coincide with those in other investigations regarding the use of portfolios as assessment tools. For instance, Etheridge (2006) found that 99% of the participants were not able to appropriately define portfolios which is in juxtaposition to the findings illustrated in the present research regarding the participants' knowledge of theoretical principles of writing portfolio assessment. In contrast, participants in Caldwell's (2007) study were found to be knowledgeable of portfolios which concords with the conclusions regarding participants' knowledge of theoretical principles of writing portfolio assessment in the present investigation. Additionally, Lam and Lee's (2010) research allowed them to propose a series of recommendations including teachers' need to be provided with training in the implementation of portfolio assessment. Likewise, Kiliç's (2009) recommended portfolio training for teachers to approach some of the problems with portfolio use reported in the study. Such proposals are congruent with the conclusion that in order for participant teachers in the present study to close the gap between their knowledge of principles of writing portfolio assessment and the actual implementation of portfolios, training in the application of writing portfolio assessment needs to be provided.

V. Conclusions, limitations, and further research

The analysis of the findings supports the following conclusions for the present study. First, there is a mismatch between the participants' knowledge of theoretical principles of portfolio assessment and their implementation of portfolios as suggested by the analysis of their portfolio guidelines via the portfolio guidelines checklist. As illustrated above, the participant's portfolio guidelines' failure to fully comply with a significant number of the guidelines suggested in the theory serves as evidence of such a mismatch. Second, participant teachers are knowledgeable about portfolio assessment theory and principles based on the results emanating from the questionnaire. Evidence of this was found in the fact that the participants regard the communication of portfolio directives in the portfolio guidelines to students as very important, they possess fair amounts of training in writing portfolio assessment, and they were able to identify advantages and limitations of writing portfolio

assessment. Third, the BET teachers need to undergo specialized training on the application of theoretical principles of portfolio assessment so that they can incorporate the knowledge they possess into their actual implementation of writing portfolios. It is suggested that the purpose of such training should be to close the gap between knowledge and practice in the implementation of writing portfolios in the BET program. Lastly, it was possible to identify the extent to which portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the BET at UCR, West Campus aligns with theoretical principles of portfolio assessment. It is concluded that such alignment is only partial since there are inconsistencies between the participants' knowledge of theoretical principles of portfolio assessment and the way they implement portfolios in the writing courses.

Limitations and further research

Regarding the limitations of the present investigation, it should be noted that the conclusions stemming from the present research are applicable to the context of the study and obviously cannot be generalized to other settings. However, these conclusions are relevant to the general discussion of the topic of writing portfolio assessment and therefore are hoped to fuel such discussion. A second limitation of the present study is that it included only the voices of BET teachers who have used portfolio assessment in their courses which results in a partial depiction of the implementation of writing portfolio assessment in the program. Thus, it is suggested that future studies include the views of students and other stakeholders such as administrators so that a fuller picture of how portfolio assessment is applied in the writing courses of the BET can be obtained.

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Appendix 1. Teachers' Questionnaire

WRITING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Purpose

The topic of the present research is *Portfolio assessment in the writing courses of the Bachelor's in English Teaching (BET) at the UCR, West Campus: their alignment with theoretical principles of portfolio assessment and general assessment best practices*. Thus, this questionnaire seeks to explore the BET faculty's beliefs and practices in implementing portfolio assessment in writing courses. The information gathered through this questionnaire will be used for research purposes only and will be treated with confidentiality in full observance of ethical research principles. Thank you in advance for your collaboration!

Instructions

This questionnaire consists of three parts. Part one asks for information about the academic background and experience of the participants. Part two presents a series of close questions about guidelines and purposes while part three features a set of open-ended questions regarding general aspects of portfolio assessment. Please answer the questions according to your personal beliefs and teaching philosophy. Also, consider your experience in teaching and assessing writing courses at the BET at UCR, Western campus.

Part I: Academic information

1. What is your highest academic degree? Put a check next to the degree you possess.

   ____ Bachelors
   ____ Licenciatura
   ____ Masters
   ____ Doctorate
2. Indicate (X) the number of years of teaching experience you have. Put a check next to the number range that best represents your teaching experience.

   ____ 1-5
   ____ 6-10
   ____ 11-15
   ____ 16-20
   ____ More than 21

3. Indicate (x) the number of years of teaching writing experience you have. Put a check next to the number range that best represents your teaching writing experience.

____ 1-5
____ 6-10
____ 11-15
____ 16-20
____ More than 21

Part II: Guidelines and purposes

4. How important is the inclusion of the following information in the writing portfolio guidelines students receive? Rank their degree of importance by checking *not important, a little important, important, or very important.*

Information	not important,	a little important	important	very important
The portfolio's purpose				
Indication of the uses the portfolio will be given				
Who will have access to the portfolio				
Specifications of the type of work to be included				
Explanations of how the portfolio will be evaluated				
A scoring rubric				
Whether the student needs to work individually or with others				
A timeline for the portfolio				
The required number of entries				
A description of the type of entries				
Explanations about the physical structure of the portfolio; e. g. scanned copies of best work in a digital file, a binder with copies of work samples, etc.				
The weight the portfolio will have on the course total grade				

5. What purposes do your writing portfolios serve? Choose (X) all that apply.

___ a. instructional
___ b. current accomplishment and progress
___ c. showcase and documentation
___ d. Working product
___ e. finished product

Part III: general aspects of portfolio assessment

Answer the following questions based on your experience using writing portfolio assessment.

1. Describe the type of training you received in writing portfolio assessment.

   _____

2. Based on your experience using writing portfolio assessments, what are three advantages of writing portfolios?

   a)_____
   b)_____
   c)_____

3. Based on your experience using writing portfolio assessments. what are three disadvantages of writing portfolios?

   a)_____
   b)_____
   c)_____

4. What role (if any) should students have in selecting the writing portfolio entries?

   _____

5. How do you use writing portfolios in your class?

   _____

6. What role (if any) does student reflection play in the use of writing portfolios?

   _____

7. What is the role of feedback in writing portfolio assessment?

   _____

Thank you very much for your valuable contribution in filling out this questionnaire!

Appendix 2. Portfolio Guidelines Checklist

PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES CHECKLIS

Use this checklist to assess the teacher created writing portfolio guidelines. Check YES if the criterion in the box is met; check NO if it is not met. Add comments as necessary to explain your decision.

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
A purpose is clearly stated for the portfolio.			
There is clear indication of the uses that will be made of the portfolio.			
Who will have access to the portfolio is indicated.			
A specification of the type of work to be included is described.			
How the portfolio will be evaluated is explained.			
A scoring rubric is included.			
Whether the student needs to work individually or with others is stated.			
A timeline for the portfolio is stated.			
The required number of entries is indicated.			
A description of the type of entries needed is provided.			
Explanations about the physical structure of the portfolio are included.			
The wight the portfolio has on the course total grade is indicated.			
Is the portfolio of the reflective type?			