



## Journal of Education & Humanities Research (JEHR)

Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Balochistan, Quetta-Pakistan

Volume: 11, Issue I, 2021; ISSN:2415-2366 (Print); 2710-2971 (Online)

URL: <http://web.uob.edu.pk/uob/Journals/jehr/jehr.php>

Email: [jehr@uob.edu.pk](mailto:jehr@uob.edu.pk)

---

### “The Implementation of Portfolios in Higher Education in Pakistan”

Mariam Farooq<sup>1</sup>, Sarwat Nauman<sup>2</sup>

1. Teaching Associate, Aga Khan University

2. Associate Professor, Institute of Business Management

Received: 08<sup>th</sup> April, 2021

Accepted: 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 2021

Published: 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2021

---

#### KEY WORDS

Formative  
assessment,  
higher education,  
portfolios,  
students’  
Learning

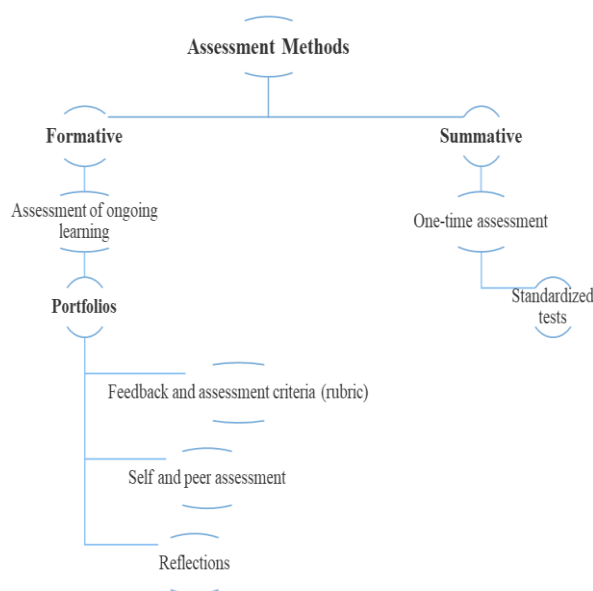
#### ABSTRACT

*Assessment activities in Pakistan, as in many other developing countries, are largely focused on summative processes. This assessment system does not assess students’ ongoing development and can lead to rote memorization and test anxiety. Alternative evaluation methods receive little, if any, coverage. However, portfolio assessment has gained popularity in the West and is being used as an alternative form of assessment. Since students receive feedback at various levels, portfolios offer an atmosphere where students can learn without the fear of assessments or assessment situations. As a result, portfolio evaluation accomplishes the aim of measuring students’ learning. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan proposes both summative and formative assessment as both forms of approaches form an integral part of education and facilitate holistic development of learning for students in the classroom (National Education Policy, 2017). Thus, the purpose of this essay is, therefore, to argue that portfolios should be used in conjunction with the one-time paper and pencil testing method.*

## Introduction

Good assessment practice is a crucial feature of effective teaching and learning in the education sector. Summative and formative assessments are two types of assessment methods (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). It is claimed that summative assessment is often confined to paper and pencil testing and does not measure the ongoing development of students in terms of their strengths and weaknesses; whereas, the formative assessment allows constructive feedback by a teacher and focuses on the learning development of students (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). The below figure demonstrates the two assessment methods.

Figure 1  
*Types of Assessment Methods*



## Formative Assessment

Formative assessment aims to improve students' learning and development (Andrade & Cizek, 2010). Strong evidence proposes that formative evaluation is a vital part of students' work and has been given a

lot of importance because of its significance in enlightening students' ongoing learning (Evans et al., 2014). The use of portfolios is now a valuable formative assessment method in education.

Research in formative assessment has focused on the fact that portfolios are currently prevalent due to their valuable execution in evaluating the continuous development of students. A portfolio is a form of formative assessment that compiles the data to enable students to build a structured, ongoing and concise image of their learning and development (Popescu-Mitroia et al., 2015). Studies inquiring the impact of portfolios on the learning of students demonstrate that there are many advantages involved with portfolios in the development of students' learning. Taki and Heidari (2011) found that portfolios positively impacted students' learning (language and writing skills). Additionally, it showed that the ability of students to write was not significantly different in the pretest. Still, it was noted that the scores of students in the experimental group were significantly higher than those of the students in the control group after the implementation of portfolios. Therefore, portfolio assessment emphasizes the learning process of students, measures success over time, and is a useful method of assessment.

A study was piloted to examine the effects of formative on university students where the learners had the option to choose between continuous assessment and summative exams (López-Pastor, Pintor, Muros, & Webb, 2011). The data showed that most students who opted for ongoing evaluation were successful, often with high

marks (good, very good, or excellent). Whereas those who undertook the summative examination had lower grades. The results proved that formative assessment is favorable among students. Its implementation helps improve students' outcomes by involving them more in the learning process, creating more consistent and continuous learning processes, and allowing students to learn from their mistakes. Consequently, formative assessment directly leads to a significant improvement in students' overall performance.

However, it is also important to mention here that the use of formative assessment often creates negative perceptions regarding the amount of work increase for teachers and students (López-Pastor, Pintor, Muros, & Webb, 2011). It is true as it takes a longer time to compile the work for portfolios, but if educators carefully plan the formative assessment process, the students and the teachers then do not have an unfair workload.

However, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan proposes both summative and formative assessments as these approaches form an integral part of education and facilitate holistic development of learning for students in the classroom (National Education Policy, 2017). Thus, the purpose of this essay is, therefore, to argue that portfolios should be used in conjunction with the one-time paper and pencil testing method.

### **Portfolio Assessment**

We need an assessment that allows students enough room to explore, expand,

develop, and empower themselves while also catering to their interests. This type of assessment must provide enough time for students to relax and explore creative ways of self-expressing without feeling forced by people around them. This is answered via portfolio assessment (McDonald, 2015). Portfolio assessment is the need of the current time because of its positive results in assessing students' ongoing learning. Portfolio development is the process of preparing, gathering, and reviewing different data sources in constructing a portfolio (Moya & O'Malley, 1994). This assessment method focuses on developing students' skills that can notify educators and students about the progress and development of student's knowledge and skills. To this end, portfolios act as a valuable tool to monitor learners' ongoing development and learning (Dung & Ha, 2019).

Brown (2002) conducted a study to investigate the learning outlook of students resulting from the formation of a portfolio. The results showed that portfolios improved the comprehension of what, why, and how students equipped information during their careers, in addition to an improvement in students' interpersonal and organizational skills. Therefore, portfolios foster learners' personal learning growth.

Additionally, the influence of portfolio evaluation on examination scores was also explored via a survey where the primary focus was on assessing the effects of portfolios on students' examination scores in learning English as a Foreign Language. The findings of 40 students demonstrated that portfolios (serving as a teaching and

evaluation tool) provided learners with a better grip on their writing and helped them with their final scores (Nezakatgoo, 2011). Learners who opted for portfolios benefited from its reflective nature as the reflection was a part of portfolios that allowed the participants to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a specific learning event. Also, with the growing practice of portfolios, the study recommended that there is still scope for more research where different research designs are undertaken as a realistic evaluation process to further explore the effects of portfolio evaluation.

Omar (2006) tracked and assessed the implementation of portfolios in place of traditional tests to check students' learning for their core subjects. The data revealed that portfolios succeeded in encouraging and assessing the learning progress of learners as their performance increased after the implementation of portfolios. Nevertheless, this raised several concerns because exams did not promote deep learning and encourage students to focus on their learning. For this, the development of portfolios came into play and was replaced with written examinations. It has been researched that conventional tests or written assessments to some extent can merely assess a portion of the syllabus. Thus, portfolios are proven to be a helpful resource to discuss students' overall learning experience.

Tahir and Muhammad Asif (2011) conducted research to check the implementation of portfolios and its impact on learners in Higher Education in Pakistan. They found that portfolios worked positively for the learners and helped the teachers to

identify their learners' strengths and weaknesses.

## **Fundamentals of Portfolio Assessment**

**Feedback and assessment criteria.** One of the essential components of formative assessment is feedback. Feedback is a 'dialogue' between a teacher and student which directs the student back to their learning. Research has proved that giving feedback to students positively impacts their learning (Evans et al., 2014). Thus, the feedback should be provided in a relevant manner to students where they know precisely how to improve their weak areas. For this, the instructor first needs to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of students and be honest and positive about informing students about how to develop their strengths further and work on their shortcomings. The feedback can be both verbal and written, which supports effective learning (Lam, 2018) and the feedback process can also take place via one-to-one consultation or through small groups/whole class feedback.

Moreover, it is imperative for students to be aware of a good piece's properties. For this, sharing the assessment criteria with students before the final submission plays an important role as students need to understand the standard of good quality work. Thus, discussing the evaluation criteria is crucial at the start of the process, and at times, teachers and students together finalize the assessment criteria.

**Self and peer assessment.** It is believed that learners should be permitted to take responsibility for their assessment, which will give them a feeling of self-commitment

and ownership. The self- assessment method through which students assess their work via a checklist will encourage them to take pride in their success. This assessment also allows them to analyze their work and rectify mistakes by themselves and become more self-conscious of their learning (Senger & Kanthan, 2012). Additionally, peer assessment is a type of review that involves students going over each other's work where students assess the quality, accuracy, and suitability of peers. Peer assessment requires careful preparation, as in many cases, students immediately do not understand how to offer acceptable and factually correct feedback. Therefore, the concept behind peer review should be conveyed to students, that it is a learning process to help one another improve and develop (Topping, 2018). Furthermore, it is also important for teachers to monitor and assist learners during their peer assessment stage in order to receive more positive response from students.

In short, these two assessments aim to bridge the learning gap(s) of students by making them more self-aware. Therefore, self-assessment and peer evaluation also foster metacognition in students as both the assessments help students gain a deeper understanding of their learning (Gafoor, 2013). Thus, the essential features of portfolio development make it a very useful tool that can bring substantial improvement in students' learning.

**Reflective Writing:** Reflections in portfolios plays role in developing one's critical thinking skills. Through the writing practice, learners can present their point of view and

reflect on their learning that allows them to raise questions during the learning process and find solutions (Sliogeriene, 2012).

The literature on both developed and developing contexts shows evidence that a portfolio permits teachers' feedback, self and peer assessment, reflective writing and is considered to properly evaluate the ongoing learning of students. However, the assessment system in Higher Education is different in Pakistan, where students are mostly assessed through examinations or on final submission without proper feedback or revisions of the work. Thus, it is necessary to incorporate portfolios as part of the assessment with a drive of assessment for learning and to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

### **Training of teachers**

It is accepted that the implementation of portfolio assessment requires proper teachers' training/ professional development activities as teachers are introduced to teaching without prior knowledge of learners, learning, and teaching in the classroom (Thomas, 2012). Such values influence the assessment approaches choices made by educators. We cannot ignore contextual realities about assessment practices, yet bringing innovation and change in assessment practice is also required (Rehmani, 2012).

The benefits of using portfolios are envisaged to be more than the drawbacks; therefore, portfolios are strongly advised to be used for evaluating students' ongoing development. It can be confidently stated that there is a need to look at the assessment



system again and add a component of formative assessment, particularly portfolios in higher education in Pakistan.

## Conclusion

To conclude, formative assessment takes into account students' progress in terms of their strengths and weaknesses. The reviewed literature on formative evaluation backs its potential to assess the learning and development of learners. To this end, portfolios provide a useful assessment tool and have many advantages. In Pakistan, a lot of work around portfolio assessment is done in primary and secondary schools; however, there is still very little literature on the use of portfolios at the tertiary level, and thus, there is a need to change the assessment practice in the higher education context, where portfolios should be introduced as a stepping stone to an innovative assessment.

## References

- Andrade, H.L., & Cizek, G.J. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbook of Formative Assessment*. New York: Routledge.
- Brown, J. O. (2002). Know thyself: The impact of portfolio development on adult learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, pp. 228-245.
- Dixson, D. D., & Worrell, F. C. (2016). Formative and summative assessment in the classroom. *Theory into Practice*, 55(2), pp. 153-159.
- Duffy, M., Jones, J., & Thomas, S. W. (1999). Using portfolios to foster independent thinking. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 35(1), pp. 34-37.
- Dung, L. Q., & Ha, N. T. D. (2019). Portfolio-an alternative form of assessment in EFL context. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 9(1), pp. 439-445.
- Evans, D. J., & Zeun, P., & Stanier, R. A. (2014). Motivating student learning using a formative assessment journey. *Journal of Anatomy*, 224(3), pp. 296-303.
- Gafoor, A.K. (2013). Beyond examination reforms: Assessment for, as and in learning. *Guru Journal of Behavioral and Social Sciences*, 1(1), pp. 25-32.
- Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (2017). National Education Policy. Retrieved from: [HYPERLINK "http://www.moent.gov.pk/userfiles1/file/National%20Education%20Policy%202017.pdf"](http://www.moent.gov.pk/userfiles1/file/National%20Education%20Policy%202017.pdf)
- Lam, R. (2018). Feedback in writing portfolio assessment. In *Portfolio Assessment for the Teaching and Learning of Writing*, pp. 59-72.
- López-Pastor, V. M., Pintor, P., Muros, B., & Webb, G. (2011). Formative assessment strategies and their effect on student performance and on student and tutor workload. *Journal of Further and Higher*, pp. 1-18.
- McDonald, B. (2015). *Portfolio Assessment at its Best*. Lap Lambert Academic Publishing.
- Moya, S. S., & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). A portfolio assessment model for ESL.

- The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students*, 13, pp. 13-36.
- Nadeem, T., & Nadeem, M.A. (2011). Impact of portfolio assessment on learners at higher education level in Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research*. Retrieved from: HYPERLINK  
<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Impact+of+Portfolio+Assessment+on+learners+at+Higher+Education+Level...-a0270815776>  
<https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Impact+of+Portfolio+Assessment+on+learners+at+Higher+Education+Level...-a0270815776>
- Nezakatgoo, B. (2011). The effects of portfolio assessment on writing of EFL students. *English Language Teaching*, 4(2), pp. 231-241.
- Omar, M. A. (2006). Filling the assessment gap: Using a learning portfolio in international development courses. *Journal of Health Organization and Management*, 20(1), pp. 74-80.
- Popescu-Mitroia, M. M., & Todorescu, L. L., & Greculescu, A. (2015). The usefulness of portfolios as assessment tools in higher education. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 191, pp. 2645-2649.
- Rehmani, A. (2012). Changing assessment practices in Pakistani schools: A case of AKU-EB middle school assessment framework.
- Senger, J. L., & Kanthan, R. (2012). Student evaluations: Synchronous tripod of learning portfolio assessment—self-assessment, peer-assessment, instructor-assessment. *Creative Education*, 3(01), p. 155.
- Sliogeriene, J. (2012). Students' Reflection Analysis in Portfolio - Based Learning. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307805529\\_Students'\\_Reflection\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Portfolio\\_-\\_Based\\_Learning](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307805529_Students'_Reflection_Analysis_in_Portfolio_-_Based_Learning)
- Taki, S., & Heidari, M. (2011). The effect of using portfolio-based writing assessment on language learning: The case of young Iranian EFL learners. *English Language Teaching*, 4(3), pp. 192-199.
- Thomas, M. (2012). Teachers' beliefs about classroom assessment and their selection of classroom assessment strategies. *Journal of Research & Reflections in Education (JRRE)*, 6(2).
- Topping, K. J. (2018). *Using Peer Assessment to inspire Reflection and Learning*. Routledge