

Portfolio as an Assessment Tool: Impact on Student Participation and Improvement in EFL Learning

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ABSTRACT

The use of portfolios as a tool for assessment in educational settings has attracted significant attention in recent years due to its potential to capture multifaceted aspects of student learning. This study investigates students' perceptions of portfolios as an assessment tool, examining their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs towards its effectiveness in assessing their learning progress and achievements. Additionally, the study explores the influence of factors such as prior exposure to portfolio assessment, instructional support, and personal learning styles on students' perceptions. The research examined students' responses to portfolio-based assessments over three academic years, from 2020 to 2023. The respondents were third-year elementary education students enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the public University of Gjakova, Kosovo, where the research was conducted. Additionally, the study incorporated a focus group consisting of five English language teachers to examine both the advantages and disadvantages of portfolio assessment, as well as the challenges associated with evaluating students through this method. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing qualitative analysis for the questionnaire responses and a descriptive approach for the data collected from teachers. The analysis of student outcomes yields several insights into portfolio-based assessment. The findings suggest that this assessment method enables a more convenient preparation process, as students have ample time, a supportive environment—such as their homes—and the flexibility to engage in learning according to their unique preferences and styles. According to teachers, the portfolio is perceived as straightforward in its appearance, yet it presents significant complexities in terms of implementation and assessment. The integration of portfolio assessment in curriculum design and the provision of structured guidelines and support could be underlined as practical implications and recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of assessment-based portfolios in educational settings.

1. Introduction

Do not number pages on the front, as page numbers will be added separately for the Proceedings. The study was conducted with students enrolled in the primary education program at the Faculty of Education at the University of Gjakova in Kosovo, as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers who are part of the institution's regular staff. The participating students were in their third year, sixth semester at the time of completing the questionnaire. This research has been carried out over three consecutive academic years, from 2020–2021 to 2022–2023. University “Fehmi Agani” in Gjakova is

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one of seven public universities in Kosovo, located in Southeastern Europe, within the Balkan region, and bordered by Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. The pedagogical approaches, particularly within the realm of teaching English as a foreign language, continually shifting away from conventional paradigms toward contemporary methods. Furthermore, alongside advancements in teaching and learning strategies, evaluation techniques are also undergoing revisions to incorporate novel innovations. As the learner-centered approach has been widely advocated in foreign language classrooms, educators and researchers are calling for more effective assessment methods that can reflect the multifaceted nature of students' learning (Cong-Lem, 2019). One of the EFL evaluation models is also considered through portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is a method used by teachers to evaluate their students' academic performance by giving them several assignments and/or projects to work on during the semester (Zaabalawi and Zaabalawi, 2024).

The primary research problem addressed by this study is the effectiveness of portfolio-based assessment in evaluating students' progress and learning outcomes, specifically within the context of primary education programs at the Faculty of Education at the University of Gjakova, Kosovo. Assessment based portfolio, as an alternative to traditional testing methods, offers a more personalized and comprehensive approach to student evaluation. However, its impact on student engagement, learning, and teacher assessment practices remains underexplored in the context of Kosovo's higher education system. This research seeks to fill this gap by exploring how students and English language teachers perceive and utilize portfolio-based assessment. The study focuses on third-year students in their sixth semester exposed to portfolio assessment over three academic years (2020–2023) and English language teachers who implement this method in their courses. Unlike traditional examination portfolio assessments monitor progress towards an objective over a period of time and the objective is set by the teacher and students at the beginning of the course (Alam & Aktar, 2019). Within the evaluation methodology sections of the curricula within the faculties of education at Kosovo's universities, it has been observed that a portion ranging from five to ten percent refers for participation in lectures, alongside other academic tasks that collectively contribute to achieving a full 100 percent evaluation. This observation highlights the structured approach to student evaluation within faculties of education at Kosovo's universities. The distribution of five to ten percent for participation in lectures indicates an emphasis on student engagement as a component of the overall assessment. It aligns with the study's focus on portfolio-based assessment, as both methods emphasize continuous, process-oriented evaluation rather than relying solely on traditional exams. By incorporating various academic tasks into the total assessment, Kosovo's universities demonstrate a multidimensional approach to evaluation, which supports the integration of portfolio assessment as an alternative or complementary method for measuring student learning and progress. According to Aysu, portfolio tasks as authentic assessments are the best predictors for students' class attendance and language achievement, which indicates that students attend class regularly to follow the portfolio tasks to get higher grades (Aysu, 2022).

During the accreditation process of the primary program at the Faculty of Education at the University of Gjakova, international experts in the capacity of program accreditation evaluators have proposed that the percentage of participation be excluded from the final evaluation of students, recommending the removal of this evaluation mechanism from the syllabi. However, academic staff claim that students' presence in class and activity in lectures significantly increase their knowledge acquisition. Therefore, there is concern that if participation is not mandatory, there may be a decrease in student participation in class. Conversely, some faculty members assert that students, being mature individuals, should recognize the importance of attending lectures and thus advocate for granting them autonomy to decide on their attendance patterns.

As a result, numerous faculty members attach significance to the organization of students' portfolios and the accumulation of coursework throughout the semester to contribute towards meeting the passing criteria by the semester's end. At the commencement of EFL lectures, students are briefed on the syllabus, with specific emphasis placed on the portfolio as a pivotal component considered in the final evaluation. During the fifteen-week semester, students are asked to complete various assignments, tests, other activities in class, and tasks as homework, to compile into a portfolio. As Suwaed (2018) points out, a portfolio is a collection of writing products, that indicates the students' writing skills and learning progress.

Assessment through a portfolio is the opposite of traditional assessment. In the past, the assessment was more considered a way of testing and grading the processes, which were often summative such as final exams (Nourdad & Banazogar, 2022). Through the portfolio, students can always keep themselves engaged by responding to the demands of the course and the professor, and also by offering the possibility to everyone. The research conducted by Muinan and Hafidah (2021) concludes that a portfolio is an effective and beneficial tool to improve learners' ability to learn English.

Here is a 14-week paper-based portfolio plan for the course: English Foreign Language for Teachers. This portfolio helps participants track their progress, reflect on their learning, and apply their skills in the practical teaching process. Here is a sample of a brief outline of activities for each week of the semester.

Table 1
Pre-planned Portfolio

Week	Activity	Reflection
Week 1 Introduction to Portfolio	Write a personal introduction (250 words) about your educational background, your reasons for taking the course, and what you hope to learn.	List three specific goals for your language teaching skills.
Week 2 Vocabulary Building	Create a vocabulary list of 20 new words, including definitions, synonyms, and example sentences.	Choose five words and write sentences about your life using them.
Week 3 Reading Comprehension	Read a short story or article and summarize it in 150-200 words.	Discuss your thoughts on the text and what you learned from it.
Week 4 Grammar Focus	Complete a grammar worksheet focusing on a specific tense (e.g., present simple vs. present continuous).	Write about the challenges you faced with this grammar point.
Week 5 Listening Skills	Listen to a short podcast or audio clip and take notes on the main ideas.	Write a summary and your opinion about the topic discussed.
Week 6 Speaking Practice	Prepare a short presentation (3-5 minutes) on a topic of interest. Include notes and key points.	Reflect on your speaking experience and areas for improvement.
Week 7 Cultural Exploration	Research a country where English is spoken. Create a poster or a brochure about its culture, traditions, and language.	Write about what you found most interesting.
Week 8 Writing Skills	Write a descriptive paragraph (at least 200 words) about a memorable place you've visited.	Analyze your writing process and what you enjoyed or found difficult.
Week 9 Peer Review	Exchange written work with a classmate and provide constructive feedback.	Discuss what you learned from reviewing someone else's work.
Week 10 Project Work	Start a group project (e.g., creating a short play or skit) in English. Document your planning process.	Reflect on teamwork and your role in the project.

Week 11 Real-Life Language Use	Write about a real-life situation where you used English (e.g., ordering food, asking for directions).	Describe how it felt to communicate in English and any challenges you encountered.
Week 12 Lesson Plan Preparation	Create a lesson plan for an upcoming unit, including teaching methods and evaluation methodology.	Write about your strategies for effective teaching that affect language learning improvement.
Week 13 Self-Assessment	Fill out a self-assessment checklist covering skills like speaking, writing, reading, and listening.	Reflect on your progress and set new goals for the future.
Week 14 Final Portfolio Compilation	Compile all your work into a final portfolio. Include a table of contents and a personal reflection on your learning journey over the 14 weeks.	Write a letter to your future self, outlining your aspirations for continuous English language learning.

According to Baharom et al. (2022), apart from being advanced as a significant and beneficial tool in teaching and testing EFL, the portfolio is also seen as an alternative assessment tool that enables opportunities for authentic, active language learning and evaluation of student progress. Kusuma and Waluyo (2023) claim that little is known about how this alternative assessment technique influences students speaking performance and self-efficacy, therefore it is important to find a method that improves speaking skills. Portfolios are often the first form of assessment that people think about when they consider alternative assessments (Llarenas, 2019).

The research aims to highlight portfolio activities carried out by students in the English language for teachers' course, which has five European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) according to the study program plan. One credit has 25 to 30 hours of workload for the student during a semester, which means that the course that the respondent students followed has between 125 and 150 hours of work. ECTS awards credits to students for their academic achievements and the related workload that is measured in study time (Impola, 2024). The traditional evaluation is based on theoretical knowledge throughout the semester, and the product of this knowledge is finally extracted by offering students to take the final exam, either oral or written, or both, but excluding formative assessment.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of portfolios as a method of assessment for students. It aims to demonstrate how portfolios can enhance EFL learning by encouraging self-reflection, fostering creativity, and providing a comprehensive view of a student's progress over the semester. The study seeks to highlight the benefits of portfolio assessment in promoting deeper understanding and engagement in the EFL learning process. Therefore, the study developed these research questions:

RQ1: Do portfolios have impact on the enhancement of EFL learning among students?

RQ2: Does portfolio assessment affect student participation and engagement?

2. Review of Literature

The literature reviewed in this study is comparable to the previous studies. As in the current study, the findings in the study conducted by Ahmed AbdelAl Ibrahim and Rakhshani (2024) show that students by using portfolios accept the chance to make mistakes, it reduces the fear that comes with other forms of testing. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Nassirdoost and Mall-Amiri (2015) which suggest that teachers can attract the learners' attention to prepare their portfolios and take advantage of their portfolios in improving their language skills in the course of time. The students' perceptions are basically in line with the findings of Sulistyo et al. (2020) which indicated that students' attitudes towards portfolio assessment were generally positive, and moreover, teacher's comment or

feedback could help them to reflect the mistakes that they had noticed before. Furthermore, research findings are in line with the study of Biglari et al. (2021) who through quantitative and qualitative methods, have extracted data for that learners were satisfied with the portfolio method, and at the end of the study, they had a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Like the results of this study, the results of the research done by Hsieh (2019), most of the students approved that portfolio assessment gave them more chances to use English than traditional assessment, and also, students showed less pressure with portfolio assessment than with traditional paper-and-pencil tests.

In the study conducted by Charvade et al. (2012), fifty students were chosen as the participants of this study, who believe that portfolios provide an opportunity for English as a Foreign/Second language (EFL/ESL) learners to monitor their own progress and take responsibility for meeting goals (Charvade et al., 2012). Reflection in the shape of post-teaching self-evaluations is also a widely popular practice in ESL education (Velasco, 2024). One of the objectives in Deeba et al., study was to assess students' achievement on the basis of portfolio, which gave a conclusion that through a portfolio, students are able to exhibit their finest work in assignments and tests (Deeba et al., 2023).

2.1 Student's Benefits from Portfolio Assessment

Integrating portfolios as both a learning and assessment tool in EFL classrooms provides numerous advantages that address the diverse needs and learning styles of students. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the benefits associated with using portfolios in EFL instruction. Firstly, portfolios promote reflective learning by encouraging students to actively engage in self-assessment and goal-setting processes, thereby fostering the metacognitive skills essential for language proficiency development. Secondly, portfolios offer a holistic view of students' language abilities, allowing for the assessment of various language skills (e.g., speaking, writing, listening, and reading) and language competencies (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics) within authentic contexts. Thirdly, portfolios support differentiated instruction by providing opportunities for personalized learning experiences tailored to individual learners' interests, preferences, and proficiency levels. As shown by the results of Mohammadkarim's (2022) research, when learners are free to select one option to write about, they normally select a topic that they are familiar with. A portfolio as a purposeful collection of students' work that demonstrates their effort, progress, and achievements in a given area can be used to measure the progress and achievement of students (Farid, 2018). Fourthly, portfolios enhance learner autonomy and motivation by empowering students to take ownership of their learning journey, make meaningful connections between classroom activities and real-world experiences, and showcase their linguistic achievements over time. Lastly, portfolios facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration between teachers and students, promoting formative feedback, dialogue, and mutual understanding of learning goals and expectations.

Drawing upon empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks, this paper highlights the pedagogical implications of integrating portfolios into EFL curriculum design and instructional practices, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness and inclusivity of language teaching and learning processes. The organization of the portfolio is done by the teachers and under their supervision, orienting and guiding the students, as well as giving timely feedback. Appropriate supervision and psychoanalysis should be provided for students at diverse levels of their learning development to motivate them in language learning, (Meng, 2021). When students are intrinsically motivated, their behavior is self-determined, they engage in activities freely and of their own volition, (Baas et al., 2020).

The findings in the study of Aysu (2022) show that portfolio tasks are the most important factors for students' class attendance and language achievement, which demonstrates that authentic assessment is an important factor. As Biglari et al. (2021) stated, in the EFL context where learning, teaching, and assessment are interrelated, the portfolio can be used as an appropriate mechanism. In the study research of Çimer (2011), two components of the portfolio process were mentioned that make the portfolio a valuable teaching tool, one of which is continuous and immediate feedback through the weekly tests (p.171). Properly designed and implemented, it provides authentic language material for assessment, increases learners' involvement in the learning process, and promotes self-reflection (Wang and He, 2020). Portfolio assessment has emerged as an alternative technique of assessment of students due to its noteworthy role in enhancing students' achievement (Deeba et al., 2023).

2.2. Negative Side Effects of the Portfolio in English Language Learning

While portfolios offer numerous advantages as learning and assessment tools in EFL classes, they also present certain disadvantages that educators should consider. The components of the portfolio are decided by the teachers, the students, or through an agreement between teachers and students (Nezakatgoo, 2011). Creating and maintaining portfolios can be time-consuming for both students and teachers. Collecting, selecting, organizing, and reflecting on artifacts takes considerable time, which may detract from instructional time or other learning activities. Portfolio assessment relies heavily on subjective judgments, as there may be differences in how teachers interpret and evaluate students' work. This subjectivity can lead to inconsistencies in grading and assessment across different portfolios and evaluators. As Phung (2016) concluded, by employing PA (Portfolio Assessment), teachers can juggle the fundamental concerns and priorities of PA, namely differing times, contexts, and students. Unlike standardized tests or exams, portfolios lack standardization in terms of content, format, and evaluation criteria.

This lack of standardization may make it challenging to compare students' performance objectively or ensure reliability and validity in assessment outcomes. According to Wang and He (2020), properly designed and implemented, portfolio provides authentic language material for assessment, increases learners' involvement in learning process and promotes self-reflection (p.76). Students from diverse backgrounds may face equity and accessibility issues related to portfolio assessment. For example, students with limited access to technology or resources may struggle to create digital tasks for portfolios, whereas those with language or literacy difficulties may find it challenging to document their learning effectively. The teacher should be a facilitator and have the responsibility to assess all projects given to the students and give an explanation to the students about the way the teacher assesses the students' portfolio (Dahviyanti & Iskandar, 2019). Students may be tempted to include products that would favor them as successful, but this may undermine the integrity of the assessment process, and the assessment as such may be misinterpreted. This sort of evaluation aims to collect trustworthy data, especially quantitative data, about students' advancement toward a certain course goal (Al-Hawamdeh et al., 2023). Teachers can feel overwhelmed by the process of grading and providing feedback on the many assignments in the portfolio, especially in large classes. Successful teaching is closely connected with identifying and implementing a suitable individualized assessment tool for the students, a tool that will match their profile (Chostelidou & Manoli, 2020). Grading portfolios effectively requires careful attention to detail and can strain teachers' workloads. However, despite these disadvantages, with careful planning, scaffolding, and ongoing support, many of these challenges can be mitigated, and portfolios can remain valuable tools for promoting meaningful learning and assessment experiences in EFL classes.

3. Method

The study used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The statistical data extracted from the questionnaires were analyzed through the SPSS program, whereas the data obtained from focus group discussions with teachers are presented using a descriptive approach. According to Creswell (2009), the study may begin with a quantitative method in which a theory or concept is tested followed by a qualitative method involving detailed exploration with few cases or individuals (p.14).

3.1. Participants and Setting

A total of 196 questionnaires were initially distributed for the study; however, only students with prior experience in portfolio assessment within their English language course were asked to complete the survey. Consequently, data from 127 completed questionnaires were analyzed. Students of the primary program who completed the English language course for teachers at the Faculty of Education were the target for the study sample, especially those who have used the portfolio as an evaluation tool, which is 127 out of the 196 to whom the questionnaire was distributed. The previously designed instrument was piloted by 7 students, which helped the author to make some modifications to finalize the questionnaire. Also, the research analyzed the data from the focus group discussion with teachers at the University of Gjakova. The focus group discussions were held in the professors' room where regular faculty meetings are held, and lasted about an hour. The questions were prepared in

advance, but the discussions sometimes revolved around complaints about the time wasted on the feedback they had to provide when using the portfolio as an assessment tool. The respondents were students from the Primary Education program across the academic years 2020/2021, 2021/2022, and 2022/2023 at the University of Gjakova in Kosovo. These data are presented in the table below.

Table 2

Respondents to Whom the Questionnaire Was Distributed

Academic year	Answered on questionnaire	Have not used portfolio	Have used portfolio
2020-2021	65	36	29
2021-2022	66	25	41
2022-2023	65	8	57
Total	196	69	127

3.2. Instrumentation

This study employed a questionnaire administered to students and a focus group discussion with teachers as research instruments to collect data. The questionnaire aimed to gather quantitative insights from students, while the focus group facilitated an in-depth exploration of teachers' perspectives. The questions in the questionnaire were compiled in a similar context to the questions that were carried out during the focus group discussion with teachers, focusing on improving teaching and learning through portfolio assessment, student motivation, increasing self-confidence, immediate feedback, and creating a learning habit, but also the challenges through which teachers collaborate during portfolio assessment implementation. Statistical analysis in this study was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), a widely recognized software for data analysis. SPSS was employed to analyze the quantitative data gathered from the questionnaires.

3.3. Procedures

Initially, the questions formulated by the author addressed various aspects related to the effectiveness of the portfolio as an evaluative instrument and its impact on enhancing English language instruction. These aspects include students' engagement and autonomy through portfolios that encourages active student participation, fosters deeper engagement by being autonomous in choosing materials to demonstrate their strengths and how portfolio activities provide opportunities for continuous feedback from teachers which can guide students in improving their work. The questionnaire was administered to students enrolled in the course titled "English Language for Teachers," specifically those in their third year of the primary education program at the Faculty of Education.

The first question in the questionnaire was whether the student had used a portfolio or not during the English Language for Teachers course. Respondents who did not use a portfolio would have to answer only three questions, and submit the questionnaire without answering the following questions of the questionnaire. The first three questions were:

1. Way of assessment: oral, written, both
2. How many times they took the exam: 1,2,3 or more
3. Grade: 6 (sufficient), 7 (satisfactory), 8 (good), 9 (very good), 10 (excellent).

Meanwhile, students who had used a portfolio as an assessment tool answered 13 closed questions, as presented in Table 5. The questions required to underline one of the options on the Likert scale from completely agree to at all disagree. The focus group discussions were recorded using telephone recording to ensure accurate capture of teachers' responses. During the discussions, the author also noted some of the focus group participants' statements. The recordings helped to listen to the conversation multiple times to create textual data for analysis. This process enabled the identification of the advantages and challenges associated with portfolio-based assessment, as perceived by the teachers in the focus group.

3.4. Study Design and Data Analysis

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the impact of portfolio assessment on student language development and its impact on continuous improvement in English. The questionnaire was administered to students to collect quantitative data on their perspectives and experiences, ensuring a broad and systematic understanding of the purpose of the topic. In addition, a focus group discussion was conducted with teachers to gather qualitative insights, allowing for a deeper exploration of their perceptions and professional experiences. The combination of these methods provides a comprehensive analysis by collecting data from both students and teachers. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for the questionnaire responses via SPSS and thematic analysis for the qualitative data from the focus group discussion.

The first three questions, as are highlighted in table 3, were designed to understand the assessment method for students who have not used portfolios for assessment. Participants who indicated that they had not been evaluated using the portfolio method were instructed to complete only the first three questions and then submit the questionnaire. These questions inquired about the frequency of their evaluations through final exams and the corresponding results.

Table 3
Students Who Have Not Used a Portfolio

Academic year	Did not use portfolio	Way of assessment			how many times they took the exam				Grade				
		oral	Written	both	1	2	3	more	6	7	8	9	10
2020/2021	36	/	21	15	2	11	15	8	21	9	4	2	/
2021/2022	25	/	18	7	4	7	9	5	16	7	1	1	/
2022/2023	8	/	5	3	8	/	/	/	5	2	1	/	/

Table 3 illustrates a noticeable decline in the number of students who have not been assessed via the portfolio method over the years. The majority of these students underwent evaluation through written tests, complemented by oral assessments. However, these students did not perform satisfactorily on the final examination, resulting in multiple attempts to pass. Furthermore, their overall grades indicate an insufficient level of achievement in this course. Conversely, students who indicated that they had been evaluated through the portfolio were required to answer all subsequent questions. Ultimately, the research analyzed data from 127 completed questionnaires submitted by students.

Additionally, the discussions with five teachers within the focus group are presented using a descriptive approach, aiming to gain insights into the challenges they face in organizing the portfolio as an assessment tool. This qualitative analysis seeks to elucidate the complexities and difficulties encountered by educators in implementing this method of evaluation.

4. Results

Since the research is based on the research questions described above, the results of the student respondents will be based on the sub-questions that arise from the research questions. The questions seek answers to what the students' perspectives are regarding the role of portfolio assessment, how much it encourages and motivates students, and to what extent it helps improve English language learning.

4.1. Findings from Students' Perspectives

Given that the research was conducted over three academic years, descriptive statistics for each year are presented in the table to ensure transparency. Refer to Table 1 for detailed information.

Table 4
Student Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Portfolios in Enhancing EFL by Academic Years

Academic years		2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023			
Descriptive statistics		N	Mean Std. deviation	N	Mean Std. deviation	N	Mean	Std. deviation	
Q4	29	1.34	.48	41	1.34	.48	57	1.40	.49
Q5	29	1.31	.47	41	1.34	.48	57	1.31	.46
Q6	29	1.41	.50	41	1.75	.88	57	1.71	.77
Q7	29	1.68	.47	41	1.58	.77	57	1.71	.67
Q8	29	2.10	1.01	41	1.48	.63	57	1.98	.97
Q9	29	2.13	1.21	41	2.12	1.02	57	1.66	.83
Q10	29	1.37	.49	41	1.56	.70	57	1.63	.69
Q11	29	1.58	.50	41	1.51	.59	57	1.36	.52
Q12	29	1.79	.97	41	2.09	1.04	57	1.47	.60
Q13	29	2.03	.90	41	1.51	.55	57	1.66	.71
Q14	29	1.72	.75	41	1.80	.74	57	1.49	.53
Q15	29	1.86	.91	41	1.34	.48	57	1.54	.50
Q16	29	1.37	.49	41	1.65	.69	57	1.43	.50
Valid N	29			41			57	Total	127

There has been a significant increase in the number of students participating regularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes who utilized portfolios over the years. In the first academic year of the research, 36 out of 65 students were primarily assessed through traditional final exams, that is, 55.38%; see Table 2 for this information. However, by the following academic year, and particularly after two years, there was a marked increase in the number of students evaluated using the portfolio method. In the academic year 2021-2022, there were 25 out of 65 students (37.88%), while in 2022-2023 were 8 out of 65 students (12.31%) who were assessed by oral or written final exams. This trend provides valuable insight into student preferences regarding evaluation methods, indicating a positive reception of portfolio assessments, which have subsequently become an integral component of the evaluation framework within this academic unit. The one-way ANOVA analyses were applied to assess whether there were significant differences between students' perceptions across three academic study years, 2020-2021; 2021-2022; 2022-2023, about students' perceptions regarding the use of portfolios as an assessment tool.

Table 5
One-way ANOVA for Three Academic Years and Students' Perceptions on Portfolios as an Assessment Tool

Years	2020-2021		2021-2022		2022-2023		df	F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Students' perceptions on portfolio	23.06	2.939	22.58	2.673	21.64	2.302	2	3.349	.038

Note: * $p < .050$, ** $p < .010$, *** $p < .005$

The results show that there are significant differences between students' perceptions of the portfolio as an assessment tool divided by academic years $F(2) = 3.349$, $p = .038$. Post hoc tests were conducted

using Tukey's HSD test. The results show that students of the academic year 2020-2021 have shown significantly higher average perceptions of the portfolio as an assessment tool ($M = 23.09$, $SD = 2.93$) compared to students of the academic year 2021-2022 ($M = 22.58$, $SD = 2.67$) and the academic year 2022-2023 ($M = 21.64$, $SD = 2.30$).

Table 6

Students' Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Portfolios in Enhancing EFL for Three Academic Years

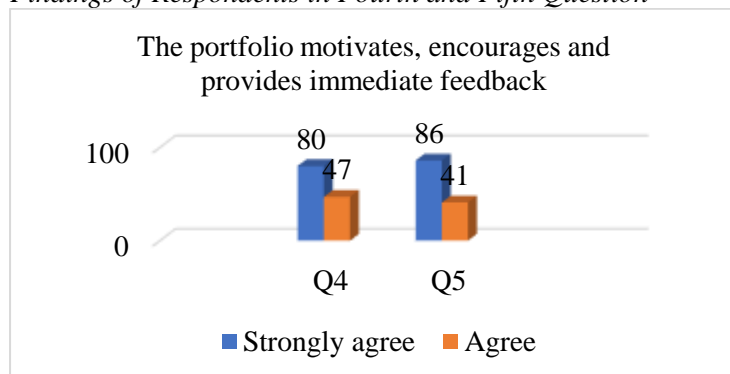
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q4. The portfolio motivated and encouraged me to learn more.	127	1.37	.48
Q5. The portfolio provides immediate feedback, helping me understand my strengths and where to improve.	127	1.32	.46
Q6. The feedback I received during the portfolio activities helped me identify the necessary skills for EFL learning improvement.	127	1.66	.76
Q7. The feedback I received during the portfolio activities helped me understand my strengths in EFL learning.	127	1.66	.66
Q8. Portfolio has allowed me to demonstrate my language proficiency.	127	1.85	.91
Q9. Assessment through portfolio differs from traditional assessment.	127	1.92	1.01
Q10. The portfolio enabled me to monitor my English language proficiency.	127	1.55	.66
Q11. The portfolio enabled me to adjust my learning strategies and learning style.	127	1.46	.54
Q12. The portfolio enabled me to track my language skills and set goals for future EFL learning.	127	1.74	.89
Q13. The portfolio helped me build confidence in using EFL.	127	1.70	.73
Q14. The portfolio has encouraged me to think critically about using EFL.	127	1.64	.67
Q15. The activities collected in the portfolio impacted my understanding of each English language skill.	127	1.55	.63
Q16. A portfolio creates work habits throughout the semester, not just preparation for the final exam.	127	1.49	.57
Valid N	127		

In total, 127 student respondents completed the questionnaire, and the primary distinction among the three years of research pertains to the number of students assessed via portfolios. This form of assessment appears to be both effective and well-received by students. The "English Language for Teachers" course is introduced in the third year of the primary education program which is mainly dedicated to studying EFL teaching methodology, whereas in previous years, English courses focused on the development of EFL skills, particularly grammatical structures. The literature provided in this course primarily addresses practical applications and classroom activities, necessitating that student teachers acquire relevant knowledge to effectively implement these strategies.

In the 2020/2021 academic year, the student cohort consisted of 29 individuals; however, this number has nearly doubled after three academic years. The written activities included in the portfolio have repeatedly affirmed to students that they are acquiring new knowledge, thereby enhancing their self-confidence. Furthermore, periodic feedback has helped students identify their learning limitations and recognize areas requiring future improvement. The portfolio assessment encompasses a variety of written activities, including comprehension checks for various texts, grammar exercises and tests, PowerPoint presentations, daily lesson plans for specific units, and collaborative work in groups and

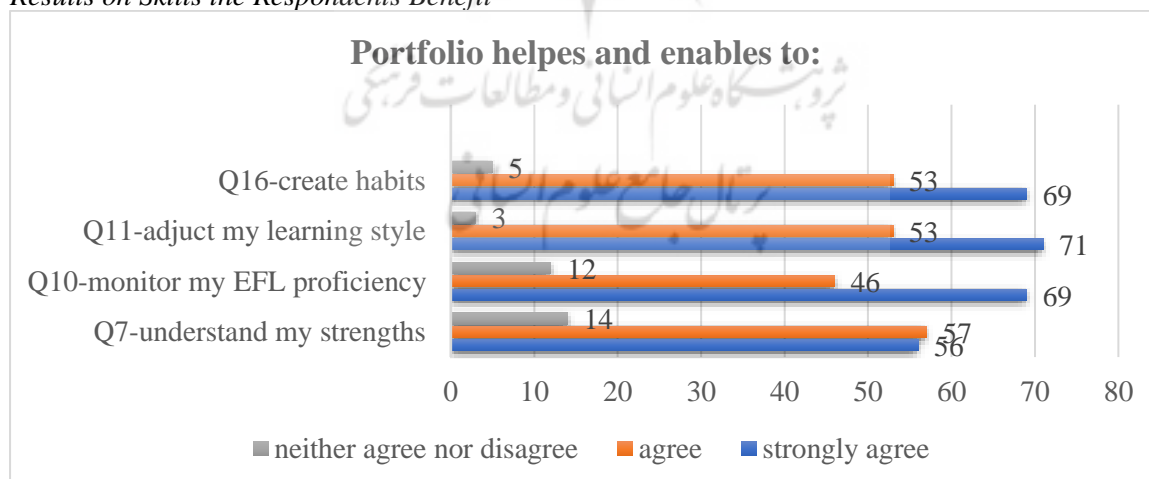
pairs. Additionally, students have compiled numerous other activities throughout the semester, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their progress.

Figure 1
Findings of Respondents in Fourth and Fifth Question



As can be seen in Figure 1, the answers to the fourth question were mainly given by respondents in only two options, 62.99% strongly agreeing and 37.01% agreeing that assessment through portfolios motivates and encourages students to learn more. The same options were also rounded by respondents in the fifth question, 67.72% completely agreed and 32.28% agreed that portfolio provides immediate feedback, helping them understand their strengths and where to improve. Notably, there were no responses recorded for the other three options. Also, the study conducted by Charvade et al., concludes that the portfolio can give students a chance to build up their experiences in language learning and this experience can motivate students to be more involved in the classroom because they feel that they have control in their own learning rather than just having the teachers tell them what they have to learn (Charvade et al., 2012). In the same line with present research are findings of the study conducted by Muha and Leka (2021) showing that a portfolio can help students become more motivated to learn a foreign language.

Figure 2
Results on Skills the Respondents Benefit



In the figure 2, the results are given in response to questions related to students' benefits in skills through portfolio assessment. In the second figure, the results are given in response to questions related to the benefits of students in skills through portfolio assessment. In response to question sixteen, 3.94% neither agree nor disagree, 41.73% agree, while 54.33% totally agree that a portfolio creates work habits throughout the semester, not just preparation for the final exam. Respondents also circled the same options in questions 7, 10 and 11. It is in line with Zolfaghari et al., classroom assessment practices

such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and portfolios can help students learn core content knowledge and skills and develop important self-regulatory habits (2023).

In question 7, which assesses how the portfolio aids students in understanding their strengths, over 88% of respondents either strongly agree or agree, while 11% neither agree nor disagree. Regarding question 10, which examines whether the tasks and activities developed through the portfolio enable students to continuously monitor their English language skills, 54.3% strongly agree, 36% agree, and 9.4% neither agree nor disagree. A similar result is observed in question 11, which inquires whether portfolio activities provide students with opportunities to practice their learning styles; again, over 97% agree, while approximately 3% neither agree nor disagree. A noteworthy characteristic of the results from these four questions is that no students responded to the two options indicating disagreement or strong disagreement.

Figure 3

The Findings of Students' Perceptions in Questions 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15

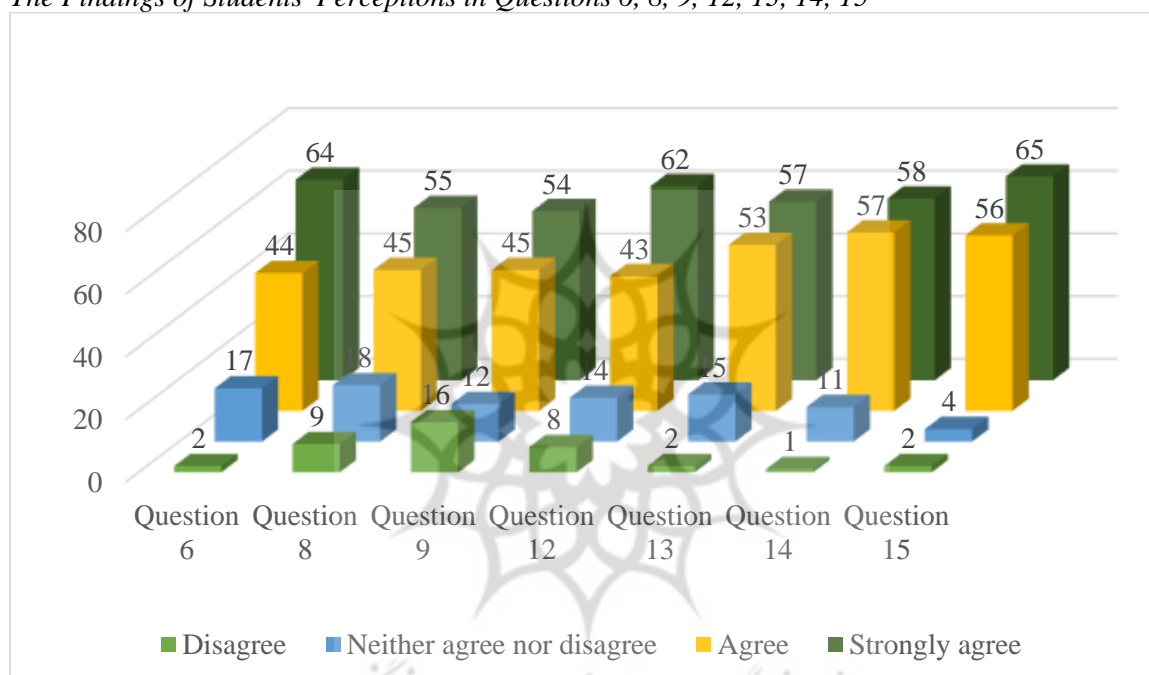


Figure 3 illustrates a minimal dissent regarding questions 6, 13, 14, and 15. Specifically, only 2 out of 127 students expressed disagreement, while the remaining 125 participants concurred. Notably, over half of these students fully agreed that the feedback obtained during the portfolio activities facilitated their identification of essential skills for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Furthermore, they reported that this feedback bolstered their confidence in utilizing EFL, encouraged critical thinking regarding its application, and positively influenced their comprehension of the various skills associated with the English language. In questions 8, 9, and 12, a small percentage of respondents expressed disagreement, since 7% believe that the portfolio has not allowed them to demonstrate their language proficiency, also 13% felt that traditional assessments do not significantly differ from portfolio assessments, and 6% declared that the portfolio do not enable them to track their language skills and set goals for future EFL learning. However, a substantially larger proportion, approximately 80%, affirmed that the skills acquired for learning English positively influence the enhancement of their foreign language proficiency through the implementation of the portfolio.

4.2. Findings from Focus Group Discussions with Teachers

During a focus group discussion with teachers lasting approximately about an hour, several conclusions were drawn from the participants' views regarding the implementation of portfolios as an evaluation tool. The topics that were discussed and analyzed from the focus group interviews with

teachers were their efforts to provide immediate feedback and the time challenges they face, but on the other hand, how much immediate feedback affects the continuous improvement of learning. Then it was discussed how much students are motivated to learn by carrying out activities and collecting them in a portfolio, as well as how much they gain confidence in using the English language as a foreign language. Another topic was whether assessment through the portfolio affects the creation of the habit of learning. The following excerpts present their opinions in their original form, reflecting the unaltered data collected during the discussion.

Table 7

Teachers' Background Information

Teacher	Gender	Teaching experience	Teaching course
T1	F	12 years	Inclusive education with methodology
T2	F	10 years	English skills – primary education
T3	M	15 years	The psychology of education
T4	F	18 years	English for teachers
T5	M	5 years	English language – pre-intermediate

Five full-time teachers of the University of Gjakova participated in the focus group, whose experience is given in the table 6 above. Also, their field of study is related to the courses they teach. Of these, T5 has no experience at all in implementing portfolio assessment. The number of students assessed through portfolios (see Table 2) has increased from the 2020-2021 academic year to the following years. Since students who complete class assignments, presentations, homework, and other activities must be regular in class, it has led to students attending lectures more regularly, in order to be part of those assessed through portfolios. Therefore, the teacher 3 declared that:

“Not all students demonstrate a commitment to actively engaging in the portfolio process. This lack of engagement may be attributed to irregular attendance in lectures, as well as a potential lack of understanding regarding the significance of portfolio-based assessment” (T3).

However, at the same time as the students, the teacher must be just as active and focused in providing these activities, which require professional development but also research into new evaluation methods. In addition, it requires technological equipment and additional materials for both teachers and students.

“The lack of experience in professionally designing, such as providing appropriate materials and planning mechanisms for evaluating each activity that comprises the portfolio, makes me hesitate to implement assessment based portfolio” (T5).

“Depending on the format—digital or physical—a portfolio may require resources that are not always readily available, such as access to technology or materials for compilation and printing, which some students may lack. Therefore, it is essential to ensure fairness and avoid double standards if portfolio submission is mandated for all students” (T1).

Portfolio assignments have to be aligned with a syllabus and well-designed in order to reflect the key learning objectives of the course and demonstrate students' understanding of the content, as well as their ability to apply it. The portfolio should allow students to engage with course content in a way that is meaningful and demonstrates their understanding over time. Further, we need to make sure the assignments within the portfolio are based on topics, readings, or projects outlined in the syllabus.

“It is challenging if portfolio assignments are not in line with syllabus standards and learning objectives, especially when trying to balance traditional assessment methods with portfolio assessment” (T2).

“I sometimes wonder if portfolios accurately reflect students' learning and abilities. On the other hand, students may express concerns about the assessment of portfolio assignments, and this may affect their overall confidence in this method” (T2).

Providing feedback on portfolio assignments is time-consuming for teachers, especially if the portfolios are extensive or require detailed analysis. Portfolios often include a variety of elements such as reflections, project work, essays, or evidence of skill development, all of which need to be assessed thoroughly. Teachers should prioritize feedback that encourages students to deepen their understanding, improve skills, or enhance areas where they are struggling.

“For me, it is very challenging to check the portfolio tasks, either because of the long time it takes or because of the constructive feedback that I have to give to the students without distinction. These challenges can impact on the successful implementation of portfolio-based evaluation, requiring careful consideration and support to overcome” (T4).

“Compiling, assessing, and providing feedback on portfolios can be time-intensive for teachers, often requiring significant effort to review diverse materials. This made me hesitate to apply this evaluation method, even though it could help me with students with different English as a foreign language learning ability” (T1).

Teachers T4 and T1 also share the same opinion with the students, stating that portfolios enable students to track learning skills, developing new activities and learning through the use of their learning styles and strategies or ways that they prefer to learn.

“I appreciate that portfolios provide a comprehensive view of a student's abilities, showcasing a range of skills such as writing, speaking, and critical thinking, rather than relying solely on test scores” (T4).

“I often observe that portfolios empower students by giving them the autonomy to select and present their best work, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their learning. I am sure that portfolios accommodate diverse learning styles and paces, thus this personalization can enhance student motivation and engagement” (T1).

Like the students, teacher 2 and 3 also agree that learning through portfolio activities fosters motivation and self-confidence in students. Through portfolio, students also recognize their continuous change in learning, and understand their shortcomings or strengths, in order to focus on skills that require greater effort in the future. As Fitriyah et al., state, teachers can enhance their feedback approaches by acknowledging and understanding students' viewpoints and difficulties with feedback (2024).

“I somehow see portfolios as tools for goal setting, as students can establish personal learning objectives, track their progress over time, and can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. Many educators believe that portfolios can boost student motivation, as they provide tangible evidence of progress and achievement, which can be particularly encouraging for learners” (T2).

“I believe that portfolios encourage students to engage in reflective practice, helping them understand their learning processes and identify areas for improvement” (T3).

5. Discussion

Using a questionnaire designed to analyze the data in quantitative method, the study investigated on how evaluation through portfolios encourage and motivate students to engage in learning and how does portfolio assessment influences on improving EFL learning. In addition, the research provided focus group discussions with teachers to understand their views and the challenges they face when implementing portfolio for students' assessment. These results were presented through a descriptive qualitative approach, citing their original perspectives. Based on the answers to the first research

question, the findings of this study demonstrate the significant benefits of portfolio assessment in enhancing student learning and engagement. One of the key advantages observed was the promotion of immediate feedback, as students were encouraged to critically evaluate their progress over time. This is consistent with previous research suggesting that receiving immediate feedback not only gives students the opportunity to improve if they feel it is necessary, but also motivates them to believe that the learning process is in a right path. It helps students understand their strengths and monitor the skills they need to continually improve. The same research has been employed by Ghorbanpour et al. (2021) where the learners were expected to write portfolios concerning the listening activities and any comments, they found necessary with the purpose to help them be in charge of their success or failure and self-reflect their progress, which allowed students to think about and monitor their learning.

Another important outcome was the self-confidence enhancement using their learning styles. The portfolio process allowed students to showcase their learning in diverse ways, fostering learning strategies and tracking their language skills. Unlike traditional assessments, which often emphasize memorization and cause stress to be assessed through summative assessment, portfolio assessment provides opportunities for students to express their understanding through various activities, including written tasks, projects, and multimedia presentations. A portfolio fosters consistent work habits throughout the semester by encouraging students to engage in ongoing reflection, revision, and organization of their work. Unlike traditional assessments that focus solely on final exam preparation, portfolios require regular updates, promoting continuous learning and skill development. This process helps students develop time management and self-assessment skills as they track their progress over time. By integrating learning into daily and weekly routines, portfolios shift the focus from short-term memorization to long-term understanding, ultimately enhancing academic growth and personal development.

Regarding the second research question, if portfolio assessment affects student participation and engagement, it is noticed that from the first academic year that the study began to investigate, the number of students who were assessed through portfolios was (26 out of 65) around 40%, while after two years, 57 students out of 65 (88%) were assessed through portfolios. This means that participation has increased significantly. Furthermore, teachers confirm that weekly activities, which require daily work from students, increase active class participation. Teachers recognize that portfolio assessment is an effective evaluation method, particularly in accommodating students with varying language proficiency levels. However, they also acknowledge the challenges associated with the implementation process. Building a portfolio content plan requires preparation in terms of providing ample materials, but also sufficient time for assessment and immediate feedback. This affects the lack of initiative among teachers to plan the implementation of portfolio assessment in the syllabus. Overall, the positive impact of portfolio assessment underscores its effectiveness as an alternative evaluation method.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of student results draws several conclusions regarding portfolio-based assessment. Findings indicate that portfolio in EFL learning has a wide array of positive implications for learning, assessment practices, and educational policy. As respondents claim, portfolios encourage students to reflect on their language learning process, which fosters deeper learning. By tracking their progress, students can identify areas for improvement and set personalized goals, enhancing their language acquisition process. According to Maknun et al. (2024), assessment with a summative activity evolved into assessment of learning (AoL), which was employed to evaluate achievement and monitor progress following a structured learning activity. Furthermore, portfolios empower students to take ownership of their learning, facilitating language learning in real-world settings and applying their learning by using their learning styles. Additionally, portfolios encourage students to advance in reflection on their learning experiences, thereby fostering critical thinking and enhancing self-assessment skills. Portfolio-based evaluation aids students in including written, oral, and creative tasks, so they can develop a broader range of skills applicable in real-world contexts. It is also concluded that portfolios facilitate ongoing feedback from teachers, enabling students to increase improvements and learn from their mistakes throughout the EFL learning.

Conversely, teachers identify several challenges associated with the organization of portfolios, attributed to factors such as time constraints, the necessity for clear guidelines, and disparities in student

engagement. Compiling diverse students' work necessitates considerable planning and continuous assessment, which can be time-consuming in the context of other teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, EFL teachers often encounter difficulties in establishing consistent evaluation criteria and delivering meaningful feedback across various components of the portfolio. Additionally, varying levels of student motivation and commitment can complicate efforts to ensure that submissions are comprehensive and reflective. Collectively, these factors contribute to the complexities of effectively implementing portfolio-based assessment in educational settings. To overcome these challenges, the study suggests teachers manage time and workload, create a clear and specific activity that outlines how each part of the portfolio will be assessed, incorporate peer and self-assessment thus reducing teacher workload, select portfolio tools that are accessible to all students, and ask students to assess their learning and progress by regularly reviewing their portfolios.

Nevertheless, teachers predominantly regard portfolio-based evaluation as a valuable approach that promotes holistic learning and cultivates essential skills in students, particularly those with varying levels of English language proficiency. The portfolio process empowers students to take ownership of their learning by actively engaging in the evaluation process, which can result in a greater investment in their education. Future researchers need to investigate best practices in designing and organizing activities that incorporate portfolios as an assessment tool. Moreover, there is a need to address the challenges teachers face in providing immediate feedback and professional assessment of student portfolios. Finally, it is important to explore activities and tasks that promote the improvement of all EFL skills—reading, writing, listening, and especially speaking. By focusing on strategies that foster the development of these skills, teachers can create more comprehensive learning experiences that cater to the diverse needs of students.

As with other studies, the present one has its limitations. The population is limited to only one higher education institution in Kosovo. Further, the present research has not mentioned a mechanism for how students are assessed and graded at the end of the semester, which may lead to subjectivity or inconsistency in grading. Future research could explore the long-term effects of portfolio assessment on students' language development, specifically how it influences their retention of language skills over time and its role in their academic success in subsequent courses. Another area for further research could be to investigate how the integration of digital tools and platforms in portfolio assessment impacts the efficiency and effectiveness of feedback, as well as its influence on student engagement and motivation.

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Declaration of AI-Generated Content

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