Ciencias económicas y empresariales

Artículo de investigación

Use of portfolios to develop formative assessment in an EFL class

Uso de portafolios para desarrollar evaluaciones formativas en una clase EFL

Uso de portfólios para desenvolver avaliação formativa em uma classe EFL

Jessica Valentina Galimberti [I]
jessica.galimberti@espoch.edu.ec
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2835-5340

Silvia Elizabeth Cardenas-Sanchez [II]
silvia.cardenas@espoch.edu.ec
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1760-8288

Andrea Paola Goyes-Robalino [III]
andrea.goyes@espoch.edu.ec
http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1338-7147

Correspondencia: jessica.galimberti@espoch.edu.ec

I.   Licenciada en Lenguas y Literatura Extranjeras, Magíster en Lenguas y Literaturas Europeas y Extraeuropeas, Escuela Superior Politécnica de Chimborazo, Ecuador.

II. Master-In Curriculum & Instr-English As Second Language Licenciada en Ciencias de la Educacion Profesora de Idiomas Ingles, Escuela superior politécnica de Chimborazo, Ecuador.

III. Ingeniera en Finanzas, Licenciada en Lingüística Aplicada al Idioma Ingles, Escuela superior politécnica de Chimborazo, Ecuador.

Abstract

Assessment is part of instruction and the importance of this element has been analyzed and discussed in different investigations conducted in many settings. Also, literature review has demonstrated that assessment will always guide teachers'´ instruction to make decisions and check student's progress. The two types of assessment formative and summative are very important tools for teachers in order to get a better and complete evaluation of their students. However, this article will be focused on portfolios assessment, which can be considered as formative assessment. Dell´Olio and Donk (2007) state that formative assessment is an ongoing process that directs instruction, which can be immediate or future. That is to say that a portfolio as a type of formative assessment is meaningful for teachers and students. Teachers can check students' progress, while students are aware of their growth and identify their strengths. Also, it provides better self-esteem and motivation for students, who can understand better their own learning process including causes and consequences of each task they are developing. This article provides useful information that will help to understand how portfolios can be adapted in an EFL setting to evaluate language skills and make out the process of implementing this strategy in classes. As a new way of adapting mentioned assessment tool, it is shown how technology and new ways of making classes more interactive, try to introduce electronic portfolios, which represents the nowadays modern approach to formative assessments.

Keywords: Authentic assessment; portfolios; formative and summative assessment.

Resumen

La evaluación es parte de la instrucción y la importancia de este elemento ha sido analizada y discutida en diferentes investigaciones realizadas en muchos entornos. Además, la revisión de la literatura ha demostrado que la evaluación siempre guiará la instrucción de los educadores para tomar decisiones y verificar el progreso de los estudiantes. Los dos tipos de evaluación formativa y sumativa son herramientas muy importantes para los profesores con el fin de obtener una evaluación mejor y completa de sus alumnos. Sin embargo, este artículo se centrará en la evaluación de portfolios, que puede considerarse una evaluación formativa. Dell´Olio y Donk (2007) afirman que la evaluación formativa es un proceso continuo que dirige la instrucción, que puede ser inmediata o futura. Es decir que un portafolio como evaluación formativa es significativo

para profesores y estudiantes. Los maestros pueden verificar el progreso de los estudiantes, mientras los estudiantes son conscientes de su crecimiento e identifican sus fortalezas. Además, proporciona una mejor autoestima y motivación para los estudiantes, que pueden comprender mejor su propio proceso de aprendizaje, incluidas las causas y consecuencias de cada tarea que están desarrollando. Este artículo proporciona información útil que ayudará a comprender cómo se pueden adaptar los portfolios en un entorno EFL para evaluar las habilidades lingüísticas y comprender el proceso de implementación de esta estrategia en las clases. Con el desarrollo de la tecnología y la necesidad de dar clases de forma más interactivas, el portfolio electrónico ha demostrado ser una de las herramientas que más se adaptan a ese proceso de evaluación, involucrando al estudiante de forma completa.

Palabras claves: Evaluación auténtica; portafolios; evaluación sumativa y formativa.

Resumo

A avaliação faz parte da instrução e a importância desse elemento foi analisada e discutida em diferentes investigações realizadas em vários contextos. Além disso, a revisão da literatura mostrou que a avaliação sempre orientará as instruções dos educadores na tomada de decisões e na verificação do progresso dos alunos. Ambos os tipos de avaliação formativa e sumativa são ferramentas muito importantes para os professores, a fim de obter uma avaliação melhor e mais completa de seus alunos. No entanto, este artigo se concentrará na avaliação de portfólio, que pode ser considerada uma avaliação formativa. Dell´Olio e Donk (2007) afirmam que a avaliação formativa é um processo contínuo que direciona a instrução, que pode ser imediata ou futura. Em outras palavras, um portfólio como avaliação formativa é significativo para professores e alunos. Os professores podem verificar o progresso dos alunos, enquanto estão conscientes de seu crescimento e identificam seus pontos fortes. Além disso, fornece melhor auto-estima e motivação para os alunos, que podem entender melhor seu próprio processo de aprendizagem, incluindo as causas e consequências de cada tarefa que estão desenvolvendo. Este artigo fornece informações úteis para ajudar você a entender como os portfólios podem ser adaptados em um ambiente de EFL para avaliar as habilidades linguísticas e entender o processo de implementação dessa estratégia em sala de aula. Com o desenvolvimento da tecnologia e a necessidade de ensinar de forma mais

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interativa, o portfólio eletrônico provou ser uma das ferramentas que melhor se adaptam a esse processo de avaliação, envolvendo totalmente o aluno.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação autêntica; pasta; avaliação sumativa e formativa.

Introducción

Assessment is essential in the learning process. It implies different activities and strategies that teachers can use in order to understand how well students are learning, and indeed this process supports teachers to improve their teaching methods and techniques. Farris, Fuhler and Walther (2004) conclude that assessment is "The act of gathering data in order to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of a student's learning." (p. 192). Additionally, assessment is always aligned with the standards each institution demands. Tompkins (2006) considers assessment as an ongoing process and it helps to gather information and make decisions in instruction. This process can also help to identify students´ strengths and weakness, assign grades, understand and record students´ informational background, monitor students, and demonstrate students´ best works.

First, it is essential to understand and define the role of the student and the role of the teacher in a formative assessment, beside the methods involved in higher education. Researchers often use a combination of formal and informal assessment methods for monitoring students' second language learning and portfolio is the most convenient and complete assessment tool, which responds to this need. Moreover, the authenticity in portfolio assessment allows students and teachers use an alternative measurement of improvement during instruction.

Portfolios as a form of collecting students works and progress checking has been useful in classrooms in different settings, since the evidence collected supports future educators decisions. According to Tompkins (2006), portfolios are a way of collecting students´ works so they can be involved in their own assessment, select their best pieces of work and demonstrate what they have learned during their schooling. Norton (2007) also concludes that this collection of students´ works are selected by the students and teachers. For this reason, it is essential for teachers to provide guides and students will be able to demonstrate their growing. Besides, a portfolio can also contain teachers' comments, notes and tests results to compare with the aim of the course or instructional goals.

Portfolios are designed in different forms, which can be presented as a folder or an electronic portfolio. In these days, the use of technological tools have encouraged teachers to use different applications that help students to design their portfolios. There are different options to build a portfolio, but the importance of this tool is the same when teachers need to know students´ improvement during instruction and make adjustment in the teaching practice in different context such as elementary or high school and university.

It is commonly accepted and actively integrated in nowadays education that students construct their own knowledge and skills (Barr and Tagg, 1995; De Corte, 1996; Nicol, 1997). Students interact each other practicing and trying to internalize concepts and making comparison with previous meanings and understandings of the subject content. This means that a "student-centered learning" is being promoted in the new era, which reflects a new way of thinking formative assessment, despite the fact that feedbacks are still managed mostly by teachers. As teachers have commonly the responsibility to make students notice the mistakes committed or reward the improvements done all over learning process, so that students can analyze feedback given and make its own to improve their skills and get better in learning L2 (Yorke, 2003; Bound, 2000, Sadler, 1998). Hence, motivational beliefs regulate the effects feedbacks (Garcia, 1995) as to endorse mistakes and self-regulate their own understanding. To that end, this article will present useful information for teachers and practitioners about the use of portfolios to promote assessment in an EFL setting.

Literature review

The term assessment or evaluation focuses on various kinds of feedback acquired from tests and non-tests, as sources of information regarding L2 learning. Tompkins (2006) mentions that teachers should not rely only on standardized tests, but they can use their own tests elaborated according to students backgrounds and needs. All this information is going to help teachers to determinate what to do and how to adapt instruction to support students in their learning pathway. Assessment in general can be considered as formative and summative, but in this two wide categories, there are many alternatives that teachers need to consider and understand the importance of evaluation in the class.

Farris, Fuhler and Walther (2004) state that formative and summative assessment are part of this process keeping in mind the purpose. Furthermore, evaluation denotes benefits of decision-making with classroom based assessments because the results help for further improvement.

As it was mentioned, teachers can use formative and summative assessment in order to improve the learning and teaching process. For this reason, it is essential to understand the importance of these two types of assessment. Formative assessment specifically generates feedback on performance to improve and accelerate learning (Sadler, 1998). Furthermore, formative assessment and feedback are important processes to show how students can take control of their own learning and become self-regulated learners (Nicole, 2006).

The teacher's role needs to alternate between decision-maker, facilitator and resource person to help students learn to be autonomous.

Students should be prepared and informed about goals to achieve in specific tasks, so that their feedbacks will be presented engaged to standards required. Many teachers consider standardized tests as sufficient or infallible tool. Hence, a systematic way of measure students' abilities and improvements do not let assess and estimate a complete evaluation of their diverse skills (Flood & Lapp, 1989).

Researchers often use a combination of formal and informal assessment methods for monitoring students' second language learning and Portfolio is the most convenient and complete assessment tool which responds to this need. Moreover, the authenticity in portfolio assessment allows students and teachers use an alternative measurement of comprehension.

First of all, it's essential understand and define the role of the student and the role of the teacher in a formative assessment, beside the methods involved in higher education.

It is commonly accepted and actively integrated in nowadays higher educations such that students construct their own knowledge and skills (Barr and Tagg, 1995; De Corte, 1996; Nicol, 1997).

Research questions

What is the point of view of researchers about feedback provided by teachers, peers, self-regulation, in relation to its effectiveness in supporting learning processes in L2 classes?

Has portfolio assessment become common practice in EFL classroom and does it help the students develop their communicative competencies in the course?

What language problems of the students were addressed that can make portfolio assessment an effective tool in students self-evaluation?

Discussion

All of mentioned concerns have been discussed and debated by researchers, therefore this paper will try to explain them from different points of view and with the support of database research, manual research and citation search, get to a clear conclusion, which will try to answer to all of them.

In the first instance, it is necessary to clarify that portfolio is a collection of students works overtime, it may include best works and other process information such as drafts, works-in-progress showing the various stages of conception, drafting and revision. It can be used as self-evaluation during the course with reference to their abilities and progress, but also it has been a teachers support evaluation approach, which emphasize the students constructing understanding and the teachers promoting understanding. Hence, a portfolio is valued as a representation of classroom-based performance, as many researchers think that it represents a modern assessment tool composed by the process and the product (Burke, Fogarty, & Belgrad, 1994). Portfolio is one of the effective evaluation tools, which students can utilize as a learning task too. It provides lined up to constructivism (Chang, 2001 & Dai, 2003) learner autonomy, which is essential, to make student empowered their own progresses. Tompkins (2006) also concludes that portfolios are worthwhile because they motivate students to get involved in their learning process. Additionally, students are responsible for their work since many educators consider sharing or showing the portfolios at the end of the term, so with this in mind, students set goals and feel ownership of their tasks during all the process.

As Gottlieb (1995) mentions, portfolio "serves as a guide for students in making choices and in demonstrating how they reason, create, strategize, and reflect" (p.12). It induces students' self-reflection, critical thought, and learning responsibility. Also, it integrates teacher's evaluation assessment system, becoming "a less threatening and more supportive activity" (p.54). An effective new assessment method, a potential alternative to the traditional standardized assessment even it continues assess ongoing learning on different aspects and skills.

As mentioned before, instead, old style tests were based on multiple choices standardized questionnaires to assess mastery of basic skills instead of assessing students thinking skills or their ability to synthesize content or solve problems. The mentioned evaluation process was definitely focused on low standards achievements (O'Neil, 1992, p.14).

Overtime, teachers evaluation requirements in a second language apprenticeship have been changed, evolved and modified according to new government and international standards and started looking beyond standardized exams when measuring student progress. Performance assessment has been gaining more and more importance since the target were not basic skills anymore, but higher standards oriented to take into consideration the ability to work cooperatively in groups or synthesize knowledge (Meyer, 1992, p.40). a portfolio provides a complex and comprehensive view of student performance and is quite different from traditional methods. "While standardized tests offer outcomes in units that can be counted and accounted, portfolio assessment offers the opportunity to observe students in a broader context: taking risks, developing creative solutions and learning to make judgments about their own performance" (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer. 1992, p. 63).

Moya and O'Malley (1994) affirm in their paper that there is a clear difference between portfolio and portfolio assessment. "A portfolio is a collection of a student's work, experiences, exhibitions, self-ratings (i.e., data), whereas portfolio assessment is the procedure used to plan, collect, and analyze the multiple sources of data maintained in the portfolio. A portfolio that is based on a systematic assessment procedure can provide accurate information about the depth and breadth of a student's capabilities in many domains of learning" (p. 17). A portfolio is not just a showcase of students' best works as in the field of fine arts, but should be the product of a complete assessment procedure that has been systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated.

To put in another words, this point of view is confirmed by Biggs (1996), who determined that representing and showing a complete evidence of a student's learning process, a portfolio assessment should be as well an active process involving collecting, synthesizing and organizing and keeping a record of relevant works; in a few words, an ongoing assessment, reflection and justification. As well, in a definite and complex demanding process of evaluation during learning, students are also encouraged to reflect on their experience, identify learning needs (Harris, Dolan, & Fairbairn, 2001).

This new approach to evaluation consist in encourage students becoming more autonomous and to take more responsibility for their work, including the evaluation of it. Also, Belanoff (1994) states that self-evaluation and responsibility is a developing process of the students, who have the task to select their best works to present for teachers evaluation or peers advice. As a result, independence, maturity and self-esteem represent the reflection of a new way of learning and development of students' deficiencies in an autonomous way.

It is evident that self-assessment and portfolios are closely connected (Farr & Tone, 1994), as portfolio assessment consists in training students to assess their own progress basically and that's why it represents a unique methodology this way. The benefits of incorporating peer assessment into the regular assessment procedures have been discussed in a number of studies. Actually, students improve radically as they are completely engaged in the learning process, self-reflecting their mistakes and improvements and at the same time, they have the opportunity to think about what they are learning and how they are learning it. McMullan (2006) affirms that students become independent learners and can increase their motivation as they are evaluating their language learning strategies and progress as language learners. This is an opportunity, as Crooks (2001) claims, to have students understand better the evaluation process and grading system and get out of the comfort zone, when the teacher used to be the responsible of the results of students works. Students are more involved and encouraged to share their ideas, cooperate with others and ask for assistance when needed.

Many researchers considered portfolio assessment as an innovative methodology, which focuses on students' higher order reasoning and higher level cognitive thought and facilitate a deep approach to learning a language rather than a surface approach (Gobbs, 1992).

Supporting mentioned point of view, two experimental studies conducted by Fontana and Fernandes (1994), and Frederikson and White (1997) have shown that students who have opportunities to reflect on their work and self-assess themselves show greater improvement than those who do not. Other studies done by Mccurdy and Shapiro (1992), Sawer, Graham and Harris (1992) also show performance gains related to reflection and self-assessment. "Portfolios are as varied as the children who create them and as the classrooms in which they are found" (Paulson, Paulson, Meyer, 1991, p. 61). It helps both teachers and students in the teaching and learning

process and it is most meaningful when it is incorporated into daily instruction, learning and assessment.

Hill, Kamber, Norwick (1994, p.118) affirm that the aim of the portfolio assessment is to cultivate students' ability to evaluate themselves and their work.

As mentioned before, there are many benefits in the use of portfolios, such as motivation and self-esteem. First of all, if students are involved personally in front line in an activity, they are motivated and begins the sense of an innate and internal responsibility in order to get the goal in the most efficient way (Hill, Kamber, Norwick, 1994, p.118). Also, they have the freedom of solving the task proposed by the teacher in a variety of ways. "Classroom activities that allow students time, choice, ownership, and response clear the way for portfolios to be used as a vital component in learning" (Graves, 1992, p. 157).

Thus, students are able to have access directly to the results of the task they have done over a period of time. "Students will begin to develop as effective decision-makers" (Tierney, 1991, p.6).

Paulson, Paulson, Meyer (1991) believe that portfolios can become and intersection of instruction and assessment, the following way:

- It offers the students and opportunity to learn about learning;

- To learn to value their own work as well as themselves as learners;

- Instructions must be clear and complete to convey a better result and approach of the students in the task;

- It should contain information that shows how students' skills have developed and improved.

Portfolio development process

The developmental process of portfolio transforms instruction and assessment (Danielson & Abrutyn, 1997). It consists in four basic steps: collection, selection, reflection and projection.

COLLECTION - It is the first step in the portfolio development process, the first activity in creating a working portfolio, collecting various pieces of students' works.

SELECTION - It is the second step in the portfolio development process; students have the responsibility and the critical self-assessment activity in order to select their works that represents best the requirements of the course curriculum. Hence, Danielson & Abrutyn (1997) claims that

the more precisely and explicitly the learning objectives are stated and the clearer the guidelines for evaluating student work, the more focused the criteria for portfolio selection can be.

REFLECTION - It is the third step in the portfolio development process and provides a more introspective task from the students, as they have to become aware of themselves as learners (Danielson & Abrutyn 1997).

PROJECTION - It is the last step in the portfolio development process, which is oriented towards future activities and processes. It represents the most complicated and specific activity of the self-assessment process, as the students have to take into account the whole work and make their own evaluation.

Assessing language skills through portfolio

In an EFL setting, portfolios are useful to evaluate language skills and mostly reading and writing tasks. However, Tompkins (2006) mentions that students can also include recordings (speaking improvement record) and other artifacts like reading and learning logs, graphic organizers, essays, writing drafts, rubrics, and more elements that students consider necessary. Moreover, students will decide if the works are original or they want to add just a copy. Teachers guide all of this process because in many cases students deal with assessing their own learning and improvement or cannot identify their strengths easily.

Farris, Fuhler, and Walther (2004) state that a portfolio is an authentic assessment because it promotes the evaluation of students´ ongoing improvement and this tool can help students to demonstrate their improvement in reading and writing as well. Furthermore, there are some considerations to keep in mind while working with portfolios to assess language skills. First, planning is important because students need to know the goals and how the activity will be developed clearly. Then students' point of view and decision is essential, since they are the owners of their portfolio. However, the instructor when collecting works must guide this decision. For instance, a student can attempt to include in the portfolio summaries, book reflections, articles read, checking lists, and many more elements derived from reading and writing tasks, but the teacher´s support is crucial in this sample selection process. The evidence of students' growth in reading and writing can be wide; but a meeting with the teacher is beneficial for each student because they can decide what to include having a consistent portfolio.

In addition, Tompkins (2006) argue that reading and writing can be assessed through standardized tests, then again, he mentions that informal assessment can be useful in a balanced literacy program. This informal assessment can be carried out during instruction and the evidence is attached in the portfolio. To give an illustration if what informal assessment techniques a teacher can use for reading and writing process, let's focus on the elements of each skill. Assessing reading includes phonemic awareness and phonics, word identification and fluency, reading level, comprehension of texts, and vocabulary. By contrast, writing skills elements are spelling, editing, organization, consistency, and mechanics. Hence, reading improvement can be demonstrated in a portfolio when a student include their progress in phonics with a test of decoding, running records, reading logs, informal reading inventories, words lists. In writing skills, students can add to their portfolio draft, pieces of writing with their corresponding rubric and inventories.

Types of portfolios

Portfolios support students growing and progress in a subject or skill; so, this tool can be shared to demonstrate and celebrates students' progress. In the light of importance of portfolios in the learning process, it is useful to know the type of portfolios teachers can use in instruction. According to Farris, Fuhler, and Walther (2004), reading and writing improvement can be shown through a show and working portfolios. The authors define working portfolios as a collection of all students sample works and these works will guide daily instruction. On the other hand, a show portfolio only collects a few samples of works that can be selected by the students with the teacher support. What's more, another type of portfolio is the diagnostic portfolio that encourage students to include a lot of information like reflections, journals, inventories, records, and writing logs.

Significantly, electronic portfolios use has increased nowadays. Cohen and Cowen (2008) mention that electronic portfolio or e-portfolios are more common in higher education and college settings. It does not differ in the main purpose of the portfolio, but the difference is that an e-portfolio is elaborated with different technological tools available on the web. This type of portfolio can be easy to develop due to all the easiness of technology access. The increase of technology dependence in our lives has encouraged educators to include tools in instruction so that students can take advantage of this. Yet the opportunities, students and teachers can find with a computer and internet access, there are some concerns that educators need to consider while using technology in class.

For instance, it is essential to have computer-literate students and teachers must not forget the main purpose of evaluation is not going to change just because of the technological tool implementation.

Conclusion

As discussed in the paper many researchers consider a portfolio an innovative and complete assessment tool, which includes and provides whole students' learning process shown by their best works overtime. It was confirmed that it is well structured in order to be an available instrument that can be used as self-assessment by the learner and a new method used by teachers. The cooperation of both parts throughout the usage of the portfolio convey a fully and exhausting evaluation of the complete learning process with reference of all skills.

Currently, feedbacks are constantly given by teachers, students themselves and also peers and has become a common practice in EFL classroom as it has demonstrated being an effective support.

As a proof of its effectiveness, it has been explained the structure of a portfolio and the different ways in which students and teachers can take advantage of it. The most useful and modern way, nowadays, is the e-portfolio, which represents future and the possibility to improve assessment processes and focus on the students and their ability to be involved in the process and self-reflection.

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