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TRANSFORMATIVE FRAMEWORK OF
EPORTFOLIO-BASED ASSESSMENT
APPROACH IN ENGLISH AS
FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM
PRACTICES
IN CHINA



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LI YAN

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2023



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APPROACH IN ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM
PRACTICES IN CHINA

LI YAN

THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULLFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES & COMMUNICATION
SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

2023



DECLARATION



DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

This declaration is made on the 25th August 2023

I. Student's Declaration:

I, Li Yan, P20201000848, Faculty of Languages and Communication, hereby declare that the work entitled TRANSFORMATIVE FRAMEWORK OF EPORTFOLIO-BASED ASSESSMENT APPROACH IN ENGLISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN CHINA is my original work. I have not copied from any other students' work or from any other sources except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text, nor has any part been written for me by another person.

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Dr Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh
Associate Professor
Department of English Language & Literature
Faculty of Languages & Communication
35900 Tanjung Malim, Perak Darul Ridzuan

Tarikh: 26/08/2023

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ABSTRACT

Examination orientation and hierarchical relationships are highly dominating evaluation and assessing system in China, hence the practical implementation of assessment reform in traditionally hierarchical societies is beset with difficulties. On the other hand, ePortfolio assessment is claimed potentially transformative to affect student learning and teacher instruction. To the end, this research then aims at investigating the implementation of ePortfolio-based assessment in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context and form a framework conceptualised in specific context, in order to obtain students and lecturers' holistic and in-depth experiences in implementing ePortfolio contextually. The qualitative case study approach to obtain lecturers' holistic and in-depth experiences in implementing ePortfolio were utilised. Data were collected through classroom observations, document analysis and interviews of two EFL lecturers. Fourteen lessons of the English course involving two lecturers and one-hundred eighty-nine first year undergraduates were observed and analysed inductively for dominant issues and categories. In addition, based on the learning theories, assessment strategies and procedures, findings of this study presented EFL assessment characteristics and preliminary procedures of enacting ePortfolios, twelve indicators to implementing ePortfolio-based assessment and reconceptualised ePortfolio-based assessment and finally procedural implementing ePortfolio-based assessment: a Transformative and contextualised framework in EFL settings. It is significant that deeper understanding of how to implement ePortfolio assessment serves learning and teaching quality in breadth and depth dimension, useful to policy-makers, educators and even assessment developers, in supporting teaching and assessment for learning. It is implicated that step-by-step procedures provided new insights for lecturers to successfully conduct ePortfolio assessment for teaching and learning in the EFL context. This enhanced lecturers' general understanding of the ePortfolio as alternative assessment and the technique of formative assessment integrated in an English learning course. Content of electronic portfolios and a well-structured ePortfolio should be adopted as learning evidence to tailor assessment for learning; contextualised and student-centred implementing procedures.

Keywords: electronic portfolios, classroom formative assessment, feedback, self-assessment, transformative learning theory, EFL lecturer

KERANGKA TRANSFORMATIF BERASASKAN EPORTFOLIO PENDEKATAN PENILAIAN DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASINGMALAN BILIK DARJAH DI CHINA

ABSTRAK

Orientasi peperiksaan dan hubungan hierarki mendominasi sistem penilaian dan penilaian di China, justeru pelaksanaan praktikal reformasi penilaian dalam masyarakat tradisional hierarki dilanda kelemahan dengan kesukaran. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menyiasat pelaksanaan berasaskan ePortfolio penilaian dalam konteks Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), mendapatkan pelajar dan pengalaman holistik dan mendalam pensyarah dalam melaksanakan ePortfolio secara kontekstual dan membentuk rangka kerja yang berkonsepkan dalam konteks tertentu. Pendekatan kajian kes kualitatif digunakan untuk mendapatkan pensyarah yang holistik dan mendalam pengalaman dalam melaksanakan ePortfolio. Data dikumpul melalui pemerhatian bilik darjah, analisis dokumen dan temu bual dua orang pensyarah EFL. Empat belas pelajaran kursus Bahasa Inggeris melibatkan dua orang pensyarah dan seratus lapan puluh sembilan mahasiswa tahun satu telah diperhatikan dan dianalisis secara induktif untuk isu dan kategori yang dominan. Dapatan kajian ini membentangkan penilaian EFL ciri dan prosedur awal penggubalan ePortfolio iaitu dua belas penunjuk untuk melaksanakan penilaian berasaskan ePortfolio dan konsep semula berasaskan ePortfolio penilaian dan akhirnya melaksanakan prosedur penilaian berasaskan ePortfolio: satu rangka kerja transformatif dan kontekstual dalam tetapan EFL. Adalah penting bahawa pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang cara melaksanakan penilaian ePortfolio berfungsi pembelajaran dan kualiti pengajaran dalam dimensi keluasan dan kedalaman, berguna kepada penggubal dasar, pendidik dan juga pembangun penilaian, dalam menyokong pengajaran dan penilaian untuk pembelajaran. Adalah tersirat bahawa prosedur langkah demi langkah memberikan pandangan baharu untuk pensyarah berjaya menjalankan penilaian ePortfolio untuk pengajaran dan pembelajaran dalam EFL konteks. Ini meningkatkan pemahaman umum pensyarah tentang ePortfolio sebagai pentaksiran alternatif dan teknik pentaksiran formatif bersepadu dalam sebuah kursus pembelajaran bahasa inggeris. Kandungan portfolio elektronik dan tersusun dengan baik ePortfolio harus diguna pakai sebagai bukti pembelajaran untuk menyesuaikan penilaian untuk pembelajaran; prosedur pelaksanaan kontekstual dan berpusatkan pelajar.

Kata kunci: portfolio elektronik, penilaian formatif bilik darjah, maklum balas, penilaian sendiri, teori pembelajaran transformatif, pensyarah EFL

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

With the advancement of information and communication technology, various tools or devices are applied to teaching and learning. It is believed that electronic portfolios are one of the most powerful approaches to such technology-facilitated learning tools which encourages developing skills of reflection, learner autonomy, professional development, the ability to manage self-regulated learning in a more



collaborative learning environment between students themselves, students and teachers, and peers. The advent of web since 1990s and subsequent growth accelerated shift from storage of students learning into digital formats also the increasing impact of assessment reform. It triggers the electronic format of portfolios going mainstream since then. Lam (2018) has reported that portfolio assessment has experienced three significant periods, initiating with the trial stage with burgeoning experimentation, second the stage of standardized testing for system accountability from 1990 to 2000, and the present stage of context-specific application, from psychometric paradigm, teacher-based assessment paradigm to classroom-based assessment paradigm. Use of ePortfolios became mature since 2010 (Lam, 2018).

At present, the third stage transformed into the language assessment from the socio-constructive perspective. In response to this period, the educational system of China tentatively advanced steps forward into reforming educational evaluation to improve assessment for learning quality. It is noteworthy that the new era is expecting significant shifts and efficient practices in the Chinese context.





Educational evaluation refers to the process of judging educational activities and phenomena, playing significant leading role in educational reform and development (Yu Fayou, 2021). In light of this, transformation of language evaluation and assessment embedded in the instructional plan is immediately needed. Electronic portfolio, known as “a digital learning container designed to support organizing learning materials and the achievement of various pedagogies” (Cambridge, 2008), provides a holistic and transparent vehicle for educators to assess student learning process and accomplishments more efficiently. It is a tool of assessment not a sort of assessment. Besides, it poses significant transformative change such as student-centred learning, collaborative learning environment, assessment approach and professional development. In China, however, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is treated and used mainly for communication on campus or in the workplace, which limit the scope of learners and assessors.

To promote teaching, learning and assessing, this research, in the first section, describes background, problem statement, research objectives and concrete questions, significance of study. The next section reviews and discusses ePortfolio components, factors impacting ePortfolio implementation and procedure, criteria, models, frameworks, assessment principles and strategies. In addition, the



theoretical framework of ePortfolio-based assessment was foregrounded from the stance of constructivist portfolio practices. Then comes the qualitative case study, consisting of research design, participants and samples, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four further discusses findings according to each research questions and specific process. The last section presents conclusions, contributions, implications, limitations and recommendations concerning ePortfolio based assessment implementations in EFL context.

1.1 Background of Study

Higher education around the world has been experiencing the transformation from immensely-adopted examination system with the aim at intra-discipline outcomes to a distinctive system evaluating inter-discipline competence as well as life-long learning (Deneen & Boud, 2014).

In the western countries, it is notable that efficient assessment and evaluation necessitate both for active learning, effective teaching and educational quality, accountability and rankings, internally and externally (Biggs & Tang, 2007;



Terenzini, 2010). By 2017, around one-third undergraduates in America reported using ePortfolios in at least one class; over one-third faculty believe that ePortfolios are capable of promoting instructional effectiveness as long as better teaching skills and competencies are integrated into courses (Dahlstrom & Brooks, 2015). The same point has been illustrated by Busteed that ninety six percent of academic scholastic officials in colleges and universities agree that scholastic growth is sufficient to student careers after graduation, though only eleven percent business leaders consider the graduates being prepared for work accompanied by twenty one percent parents are assured tertiary education is valuable (Williams, 2016), and 35% of families are certain that their children are well-prepared for employment (Stansbury, 2016). All these numbers are the implications of potential issues concerned with credibility, responsibility and accountability from instructor and institutional perspectives.

To catch this trend, the Higher Education Department of China Ministry of Education issued educational policies of assessment for learning in recent years. In 2020, the State Council of the People's Republic of China has published *The Overall Plan for Deepening the Educational Evaluation Reform in the New Era*, advocating “to improve summative assessment, reinforce formative assessment, explore added-





value assessment and strengthen comprehensive as assessment.” Another significant advocate of further integration of information and technology with education in China was put forward by the Ministry of Education in 2021 as a “shift from an over- emphasis on passive learning, rote-memorization and mechanical training to one that promotes students’ active participation, independent inquiry, practical ability, problem- solving skills and teamwork”.

The examination orientation is highly dominated evaluation and assessing language competence in China (Chen et al., 2021) by Confucian Heritage Culture since 500 B.C., which in turn influences policy-making, institutional and courses including foreign languages. Due to the hierarchical socio-cultural characteristics and testing habits in China, the practical implementation of assessment reform in traditionally hierarchical societies is hampered by difficulties. The educators are safe in their leading role for teaching and assessment and students naturally tend to depend heavily on their teachers’ instruction. Besides, test and examinations have prevailed incredibly in China which strongly limits “the social and socially constructed nature of assessment” (Barman, 2022, p. 658). In this case, the examination culture in China seems incompatible with the rationale of policy from Chinese government in terms of assessment methods especially. Adequate



approaches for measuring and assessing student competencies and skills with the optimum level of accuracy, especially are sitting in the digital era.

In detail, measurement scales, in Chinese Higher Education Institutions, incorporate performance and final exam scoring from 20% to 70% and 80% to 30% respectively, all in 100%. More specifically, the inclusion criteria in performance assessment such as assignments, attendance and classroom participation count for the grading. According to Harley and Crick (2003), students differentiate in perceptions of their motivations and capabilities achieved in assessment practices.

Both lecturers and learners tend to believe that the important learning content is emphasised by assessment.

In China, some lecturers highly appraise the benefits of ePortfolios (Liu & Li, 2020) and use it mainly as a tool to document student progress in learning (Yang, 2019) and students are required to collect individual learning assignments to compile the ePortfolios.

Spolsky (2017) claimed that China has the longest history worldwide. The Chinese history of examination and test can be traced back to thousand years ago

since the Sui Dynasty. Higgins and Sun (2012) proclaimed the imperial examination (ke ju) as the pioneering standardised test on the basis of merit. The testing-oriented device has been dominating teaching practices in all educational disciplines.

Generally speaking, the EFL courses are opened from Grade Three in elementary schools in China to the second year of tertiary level. The Ministry of Education's "College English Teaching Guidelines" (2020) also pointed out that teachers should pay attention to improving teaching methods, and form curriculum teaching with dynamic assessment, such as formative assessment as the main

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assessment mode.

As far as the present status quo of EFL learning in China is concerned, the large-scale standardised language test is prevalent, embracing National Matriculation English Test, the Graduate School Entrance English Examination, College English Test, English Test for International Communication and the Public English Testing System. *China's standards of English* (GSE) has been correspondingly launched in 2014 which actively responded to promoting equitable education in China. The main contribution concerns the pragmatic competency and cognitive development in language proficiency (Min et al., 2020). Enlarging



learning process and gains through alternative assessment practices needed further exploring. Wang (2012) conducted a study in portfolio learning and assessment in a Chinese junior high school to measure effectiveness. This year (2023) is a critical year for national assessment evaluation reform. In 2020, the *Overall Plan for Deepening the Reform of Education Evaluation in the New Era* issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council clearly stated: adhere to scientific and effective evaluation, improve result evaluation, strengthen process evaluation, explore value-added evaluation, improve comprehensive evaluation, make full use of information technology, and improve the quality of education evaluation. Scientific, professional, and objective; the overall plan is a programmatic document that guides the reform of educational evaluation, and provides basic guidelines for the reform of higher education evaluation and career development.

Nonetheless, the higher requirements for higher education in the new era also highlight the current situation and shortcomings of education, especially in the practice of educational evaluation. Many teachers do not know how to continuously and effectively evaluate students, and the reform of educational evaluation is imperative (Ye Fugui, 2019). In the new era of comprehensively promoting





educational modernisation, it is necessary to fully understand the connotation and function of educational evaluation, establish a correct view of evaluation and performance, and focus on promoting evaluation orientation, evaluation standards, evaluation mechanisms and evaluation management.

School reform in China focuses on cultivating morality, embodying Chinese characteristics, strengthening technological innovation, and promoting modernisation of education with the reform of education evaluation. Yang Xianmin (2014) believes that combination of big data technology and the new generation of information technology such as the Internet of Things, cloud computing, and mobile communications provides technical conditions for educational evaluation to move from empiricism to data. The comprehensive collection, storage and analysis of process data can also be used to visually present the evaluation results through data visualisation technology. In terms of teaching evaluation and management evaluation, relying on data to speak should become the guiding ideology of educational evaluation.

Alternatives to traditional assessment, therefore, ePortfolios are considered as optimal approaches to visualise the learning process and provide new insights to



educators. Concept of ePortfolio is simply used as a digital collection of documenting individual artefacts about learning process, self-reflective thinking of strengths and weaknesses and sharing with teachers and peers in a more collaborative way. It motivates active collaborative learning (Joseph & Lawler, 2021), student-learning (Adam, 2013), deep learning and knowledge transfer (Kathleen & Tian, 2016). In a nutshell, Barret (2005) states three main purposes of using ePortfolios: assessment, student-centred learning and employability. Jones and Shelton (2011) maintain ePortfolios are “medium for reflection”. For the purpose of assessing, Reeves (2000) proposes that portfolio assessment is one of the main alternative approaches, especially in the online learning platforms. EPortfolios assess learner’s performance as well as lecturer’s teaching quality in terms of strategies and tools adopted for lecturers are capable of identifying learning difficulties, monitoring learning progress, providing feedback and revising teaching plans (Lamberthus & Kunder, 2021).



1.2 Problem Statement

It has been pointed out that the practical implementation of alternative assessment in traditionally hierarchical societies should be taken with great caution, because of the socio-cultural characteristics and testing habits of that country. The examination orientation is highly dominant in the evaluation and assessing system in China (Chen et al., 2021) by Confucian Heritage Culture since 500 B.C., which in turn influences policy-making, institutional offerings and courses including College English (Bahtilla & Xu, 2021). The implementation of assessment for learning principles and practices usually lags far behind the declared policies and this turns to be also the case of Chinese language testing and assessment reform. As stated, Chinese learners are situated in the context of English as a Foreign Language. Test and examinations have prevailed incredibly in China which limits “the social and socially constructed nature of assessment”. In other words, many discrepancies exist between policies for alternative assessment and the implementation of those policies into language classroom practices.

Inbar-Lourie (2015) has reviewed the discrepancies between policies for alternative assessment and the implementation of those policies into language





classroom practices. A few countries were examined as case studies in this review, including UK, Canada, Denmark, Hongkong and China. It has been pointed out that the practical implementation of alternative assessment in traditionally hierarchical societies, such as those found in certain parts of Asia, should be taken with great caution, due to the socio-cultural characteristics and testing habits of the area (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Hill and Barber (2014) highlighted, the implementation of assessment for learning principles and practices usually lags far behind the declared policies and this turns to be also the case of language testing and assessment reform in China.



More importantly, the discrepancies in coherent model of ePortfolio and assessment practice increased the possibility of under-development implementation effects in classroom contexts.

It has been pointed out that the most challenging responsibility by lecturers in their role is to design, implement and evaluate and assess students' learning process. From lecturers' view, the assessment is narrowed down in meaning and isolated from the teaching and learning process. Inadequate approaches for measuring and assessing student's competencies and skills with the optimum level of accuracy, especially beset





the digital era. EFL context says little about ePortfolio and assessment. Few empirical studies on alternative assessment to minimise the socio-cultural influences on education and fewer studies have searched for the transformation of EFL lecturer roles and learners' engagement in ePortfolio-based assessment practice.

According to Pryor and Crossouard (2008), assessment is accomplished and located within the socio-cultural context. It is overlooked in the EFL context that which types of assessment are suitable and cater for Chinese teachers and learners.

From lecturers' view, the assessment is narrowed down in meaning and isolated from the teaching and learning process. There is very little articulation of the

assessment of assignments and progress, or explicit implementation procedures.

Specification of process assessment or alternative assessment need to be emphasised and carried out within and beyond classroom in line with Pryor and Crossouard (2008) that "finding new tools and change classroom practices" symbolise enhancing formative assessment espousing the electronic portfolios. Berry (2011) points out "there were no concrete ways available to help them use assessment for teaching and learning purposes" (p. 54). Generally speaking, Chinese EFL teachers have difficulties in using formative assessment for classroom instruction (Chen et al., 2014).



According to Purpura (2016) fewer studies have searched for the EFL learners' understanding and engagement of classroom assessment practice and few empirical studies exist on alternative assessment to check the effectiveness on learners and educators.

Therefore, the appraisal and evaluation of this added value need to be stressed (Becker et al., 2017). It is overlooked in the EFL context which types of assessment are suitable and cater for Chinese teachers and learners. From lecturers' view, the assessment is narrowed down in meaning and isolated from the teaching



and learning process.

Chinese EFL teachers have difficulties in using formative assessment for classroom instruction. It is shown that little procedures in electronic portfolio embedded in the instructional design is explicitly presented by lecturers. Additionally, ePortfolio is mainly used for learning documentation and students prefer to continually use ePortfolios in their English learning while challenges remain in the assessing part. A few countries examined as case studies in this research field, including China. Fewer studies have investigated EFL learners' understanding and engagement of classroom assessment practice and few empirical



studies have been done on alternative assessment to check the effective productivity on learners and educators.

In other words, the current assessment approach is unitary, unilateral, unclear in purposes and product-oriented. These characteristics contradicted with the common goals among officials, institutions, educators, students and parents.

To address these gaps, this study aims at investigating the implementation of ePortfolio-based assessment practice in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It further provided theoretical justification for actionable step-by step procedures to give new insights for EFL lecturers to implement ePortfolio assessment for teaching and learning in the EFL context, and to inform policy-making on educational assessment in an adaptive perspective.

1.3 Research Objectives and research questions

Fox (2008) discussed ePortfolios as a reinforcement tool of assessment for learning.

Robust literature show the ePortfolios can be used as a means for learners, whereas



only a small number of empirical studies have been explored on ePortfolio as an assessment instrument in the EFL context. When it comes to formative, activities or information as to modifying teaching and learning activities to adapt instruction to meet learning needs will come into being naturally. On the contrary, assessment for learning is capable of providing insights mainly for the students so that they make appropriate decisions through different level. It is also inquiring about how students develop their learning to meet the standards leading to success. Assessment for learning concerns the process integrated with teaching and learning, informing students through effective feedback and criteria involving higher achievement. Then



what are the stages of utilising the information to improve teaching and learning? It

is initiated with clarified, well-planned and shared learning intentions, followed by self-assessment and feedback depending on learning intentions, which leads to specific goal-setting and appropriate questions, ultimately to higher achievement.

Even though the assessment for learning is regarded as one of the most efficacious ways of improving learning, less consideration of teaching adjustment can be found.

In this sense, this study is guided by the following research objectives:

- i. To investigate electronic portfolio procedures, assessment purposes and techniques EFL lecturers implemented in classrooms.





- ii. To explore factors associated with both students and lecturers to develop implementation of well-structured ePortfolio-based assessment.
- iii. To provide explicit and contextual guidelines transformed for future assessing for learning.

Tsun-Lih Yang (2012) defined the classroom assessment, as non-standardised and small-scale, are those according to teaching goals and learning needs that lecturers design, plan, adapt and implement in classrooms. It embraces traditional and alternative assessment. Classroom assessment specifies needs and characteristics of individual students. It can enhance the learning process. However, how classroom assessment, including formative and summative form are enacted by English as a Foreign Language lecturers has been beyond the focus of empirical study. Thus given the lack of empirical investigation on tertiary education and EFL context, research need is drawn to describe and explain tertiary EFL classroom assessment practices in China. Furthermore, studies on how ePortfolios and assessment can be put together into theory and practice more effectively are relatively scant. Lecturers failed to define goals and criteria to students. Although multiple assessment techniques are used in class, lecturers relied heavily on instructor-dominated assessment methods. Besides, the potential of electronic





portfolios and assessment strategies in supporting EFL learning had not been fulfilled. Given that assessment had been integrated into EFL contexts to enhance learning, in-depth research is explored in this regard. The aim of this study is to explore, explain and predict modeling ePortfolio-based assessment in the EFL context. Specifically, it investigates the following research questions:

- 1) How do the Chinese EFL lecturers put ePortfolio and assessment into their classroom practices?
- 2) What are the key factors supporting language lecturers to implement ePortfolios and assessment successfully?
- 3) Hence what ePortfolio assessment procedures would be feasible and appropriate for EFL teaching and learning in the Chinese higher education context?

The actual assessment has received limited attention; thus a case study of ePortfolio-based assessment is investigated. Baume (2004) stated two components for ability-assessing, including evidence in ePortfolios and critical commentary on the achievement shown in ePortfolios and the intended learning results. Besides, the issue of reliability particularly challenges in assessment of ePortfolios arise. The validity of alternative assessment is seldom at questioning, but the reliability is



presumably high when validity is satisfied. Illumination of how assessment is implemented might elaborate the reliability problem (Baume et al., 2004) which is not forthcoming in present literature. The improving assessment also is suggested in conducting reliable assessment. It is struggling to identify the key variables and the effects and to minimise possible variations by explicating criteria in the assessment practice. It is discussed in detail in this chapter. The study clarified use of assessment criteria with justification of results and provision of feedback to students. The criteria might underpin learning judgements being made.

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The construct of this study expands on exploring the implementation of ePortfolio assessment in the EFL educating context which defines theories that supports development of this conceptual framework as a teaching and assessment tool. Based on the research aims and problem statement, qualitative case study will be employed, data collected by instrument of classroom observation and semi-structured interview, and data will be approached through thematic analysis.



1.4 Operational Definitions

Within this section, definitions and implications for practice concerning formative and alternative assessment, classroom assessment, ePortfolios, EFL lecturers, ePortfolio assessment are given. It is expected that a space is needed opening up for diverse learning styles to be assessed authentically, hence, several terms in ePortfolio assessment, language learning and practice will be identified and discussed to increase understanding and further investigation, incorporating electronic portfolios, formative assessment, alternative assessment, portfolio assessment, classroom assessment, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

1.4.1 Electronic portfolios

Electronic portfolios (hereafter ePortfolios) are generalised as a digitalised dossiers where students' language learning progress are compiled, reviewed and reflected (Yancey, 2019). Similarly, Reynolds and Patton (2014) defined electronic portfolios as digital representations of students' learning development and achievement along with learning reflections. It focused on the portal from the standpoint of learning





whereas the instruction facet is elaborated by Lam (2021) that rationale for ePortfolios as not simply to promote learning, but also to revolutionise language testing and deliver lessons.

Moreover, through ePortfolios educators could then tailor their instruction to invest more time on the areas where students are struggling to address the gaps in their knowledge (Sloan & Scharff, 2022). The outcomes need applied and utilised to teaching and learning in a specific setting. A similar explanation has been made by the European Institute for E-Learning that electronic portfolio is “a digital collection of authentic and diverse evidence, drawn from a larger archive representing what a person has learned over time and on which the person has reflected, and designed for presentation to one or more audiences for a particular rhetorical purpose.” Both achievements and instruction designs are indispensable. Additionally, multiple perspectives could be found in the descriptions of web-portfolios. Portfolios are mainly gathered in paper format while electronic portfolios are more characterised by “a digital container capable of storing visual and auditory content including text, images, videos and sound”. Therefore, ePortfolios play the role in demonstrating students’ learning process in which assessment, reflection, and pedagogy are highlighted as well. In the context of this study, ePortfolios refer to those files stored





in Microsoft Word Software, including personal files, course-related artefacts, self-reflection documents, peer reviewing and feedback notes.

1.4.2 Formative assessment and Alternative assessment

Hedge (2000) made a statement about assessment as an “interactive and collaborative process in which information is collected in natural classroom instructional encounters.” From this quotation student-teacher collaboration during classroom practice was stressed in the traditional perspective. McManus (2008)

described formative assessment as a “process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students’ achievement of intended instructional outcomes” (p. 3).

Alternative assessment is defined as a continuous process involving educators and students in making judgments about the progress, focusing on student as active learner supported for ownership of learning (Lam, 2017). Similarly, alternative assessment is an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in making judgments about the student's progress in language using non-conventional strategies (Hancock & Charles, 1994, p. 3).



In the testing- and examination-dominated assessment situations in China in this study, a representative ePortfolio is considered as the optimal alternative to traditional measurement tools; thereby it can be defined that both formative assessment and alternative assessment will perfectly enhance process-oriented assessment method which provide general guidelines for implementing ePortfolio assessment.

1.4.3 Classroom assessment

Classroom assessment (CA) refers to the assessment of student learning conducted in classroom settings, as opposed to external standardised testing (Leung, 2005). CA is seen as a process with three basic stages: collecting information about learning, making a judgement about the collected information and using the judgement (Black & Wiliam, 2009). In this study, classroom assessment techniques are viewed as those appraisals accompanied by the teaching and learning activities and tasks, and embedded in the teaching plan and whole assessment process. Besides, the ePortfolios as medium can be used to collect learning evidence, then students' performance will be synthesised and analysed according to learning objectives



clarified by lecturers, and finally ePortfolios as assessment tool will enhance the learning process and product.

1.4.4 Portfolio assessment

Writing assessment, portfolio assessment, and classroom assessment are claimed as valid approaches to assessment. As an alternative to assessment, portfolio assessment refers to “an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the student’s progress.” The language field has witnessed its growing use especially in writing skills (Hancock & Charles, 1994, p. 4). The initial definition of portfolio assessment by Ford and Larkin (1978) as “the portfolio system entails the disinterested judging of each student’s work, collected, like the best representative work of an artist, into a “portfolio” (in this case a large manila envelope), which is read by at least one teacher besides the one from whom the student is taking the class” (p. 951). It emphasised the product as assessment target while the assessment purposes of process and product need taking into consideration.



According to this purpose, learning evidence or learning artefacts go into the portfolios or electronic portfolios; hence in this study, the representative portfolio is documented and archived in digital format as ePortfolios, focusing on the process-oriented method characterising integral, portable and vivid teaching, learning experiences and assessment procedures. In this respect, Taylor (2019) claimed ePortfolio assessment to be potentially transformative to improve student learning and teacher instruction for the evidence of learning process toward specific skills in the most visible and observable manner (Lam, 2019).



1.4.5 English as a Foreign Language lecturers

English as a foreign language (EFL) refers to “teaching and learning of English in a setting in which English is neither widely used for communication among the nation, nor is it used as the medium of instruction” (Membrive, 2020). It is a term used by non-native speakers to describe English as not a dominant language in their countries. The lecturers in EFL context are expected to be qualified with professional literacy (Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011), assessment literacy (Coombe et al., 2020) and digital literacy (Falloon, 2020).





In this study, the lecturers represent a group of college teachers, with Doctor Degree of TESL, who are knowledgeable, competent, and experienced in language teaching and assessing. Meanwhile, they are capable of operating commonly-used technological tools and software, such as the Microsoft Word Files. More noticeable is that EFL lecturers are more concerned with ePortfolio assessment for learning.

In light of these defined terms with inclusion of electronic portfolios, alternative, formative and classroom assessment as well as portfolio assessment, EFL context and lecturers, the ePortfolio-based assessment thus is stated as an ongoing, collaborative, constructive, goal-oriented and meaning-making process, developing with judgement, visualising guidelines for feedback, reflection and peer-assessment accompanied by defined objectives from abundant digital collection of learning evidence, experience and performance. The results are determined by ePortfolio rubrics and assessment criteria in formative approach in the EFL context. The interpretation and operation of these terms are used in this study and allowed fundamental understanding for further investigation.



Table 1.1

Operational Definitions

Terms	General definitions	Operational definitions
Electronic portfolios	<p>“digital representations of students’ work and accomplishments along with their reflections on learning. The ePortfolio has the potential to enhance students learning through the process of collect, select, reflect and share.” (Reynolds & Patton, 2014)</p> <p>“elicited, interpreted and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited’ (Black & William,2009; 2018).</p>	<p>For the purpose of this study, ePortfolios refer to those files stored in Microsoft Word Software, including personal files, course-related artefacts, self-reflection documents, peer reviewing and feedback notes.</p>
Formative assessment		
Alternative assessment	<p>Alternative assessment is defined as a continuous process involving educators and students in making judgments about the progress, focusing on student as active learner supported for ownership of learning (Lam, 2017).</p>	<p>In the testing- and examination-dominated assessment situations in China in this study, a representative ePortfolios considered as the optimal alternative to traditional measurement tools thereby it can be defined that both formative assessment and alternative assessment will perfectly enhance process-oriented assessment method which provide performance-relevant information for implementing ePortfolio assessment.</p>

(continue)

Table 1.1 (*continue*)

Terms	General definitions	Operational definitions
Classroom assessment	Classroom assessment (CA) refers to the assessment of student learning conducted in classroom settings, as opposed to external standardized testing (Leung, 2005).	In this study, classroom assessment techniques are viewed as those appraisals accompanied by the teaching and learning activities and tasks, and embedded in the teaching plan and whole assessment process. Besides, the ePortfolios as medium can be used to collect learning evidence, then students' performance will be synthesized and analyzed according to learning objectives clarified by lecturers, and finally ePortfolios as assessment tool will enhance learning process and product.
Portfolio assessment	“an ongoing process involving the student and teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the student's progress” (Han Cui, Yuping Tong & Yueming Hou, 2012).	In this study, the representative portfolio is documented and archived in digital format as EPortfolios, focusing on the process-oriented method characterizing integral, portable and vivid learning experiences and assessment procedures.
EFL lecturers	“teaching and learning of English in a setting in which English is neither widely used for communication among the nation, nor is it used as the medium of instruction” (Veronica Membrive, 2020). The lecturers in EFL context are expected to be qualified with professional literacy (Carlisle, J. F., & Berebitsky, D, 2011), assessment literacy (Coombe, Vafadar & Mohebbi, 2020) and digital literacy (Falloon, G, 2020).	In this study, the lecturers represent a group college teachers, with Doctor Degree of TESL, who are knowledgeable, competent, and experienced in language teaching and assessing. Meanwhile, they are capable of operating commonly-used technological tools and software, such as the Microsoft Word Files. More noticeable is that EFL lecturers are greater concerned with ePortfolio assessment for learning.

(continue)

Table 1.1 (*continue*)

Terms	General definitions	Operational definitions
ePortfolio-based assessment	Eportfolio-based assessment thus is stated as ongoing, collaborative, constructive, goal-oriented and meaning-making process, developing with judgement, visualising guidelines for feedback, reflection and peer-assessment accompanied by defined objectives from abundant digital collection of learning evidence, experience and performance. The results are determined by ePortfolio rubrics and assessment criteria in the formative approach in the EFL context.	

The interpretation of ePortfolio assessment emphasises practices, information for feedback, achievement of evidence, the roles of teachers, students and peers, making decisions about future instruction through modifying activities elicited from ePortfolios. College faculty can make decisions about how to adjust and plan future lessons. These enlarge purposes, functions, participants and procedures.

1.5 Conceptual Framework of ePortfolio assessment

In light of functions, ePortfolios are prior in effective learning, professional identity, reflection, authentic assessment and pedagogy for instructors. The ePortfolios, being



used as instrument for assessment, demonstrate learning achievement and improvement needed.

As abstracted above, electronic portfolios are trusted as a tool and means for making the reflective learning process visible. It is also referred to as avenue through which self-identity is fulfilled and students believed that portfolio approach enhanced their awareness of professional self-development (Bennett et al., 2014). In line with this, Watty and McKay (2016) remark that, through electronic portfolios, learners identify their strengths and weaknesses, set learning objectives, own and construct self-directed learning. When students are provided with more opportunities by ePortfolios to reflect and do self-assessment on their learning process, they tend to be appreciated and accepted.

To some extent, they are “sense-makers” (Rummel, 2008) who actively set goals, identify achievements, and structure new knowledge. In addition, they are meaning-negotiators in the process of identity construction with the ePortfolios as vehicles, through which personalised learning and active learning are believed to be catalysed. Bennett (2013) asserts that identity has the strength that “directs, regulates and sustains individual learning, job creation and acquisition actions and career-





building strategies” The documentation in the ePortfolios may provide e-identity for learners (Ittelson, 2001) and reflection of documentation could influence identity in professional development (Zecker, 2012), for allowing aligning with motivations, values, interest and goals. In this sense, ePortfolios are capable of promoting and clarifying negotiation process of identity and construction of digital identity is equivalent to the creation of ePortfolios. Students’ identity can be designed, expressed and modified over time (McAlpine, 2005) and further self-represented, self-aware, self-reflected by using technological tools or “personal identity technologies” (Roberts, 2006).



A Transparency Framework developed by the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment falls into components of evidence and statement of learning and using, assessment resources, plans and activities. Ravet (2005) holds that ePortfolios are combined of course-related assignments and reflective practice in archives, views from instructors and peers, services to build and explore archives and views, such as assessment and professional development. Windley (2005) contended that the digital identity is composed of intra-person portrait and inter-person relations, and the selection, crafting and operation of e-identity is crucial in ePortfolio assessment (Snider & McCarthy, 2012). Feedback is defined as a



component for ePortfolios (Mojca Babovič et al., 2019). What makes ePortfolio effective in learning and assessment is the pedagogy in which it is scaffolded. Meanwhile, the identity negotiation and construction shifted focus from instructor-driven path to student-centred approach that promotes collaboration, reflection and creation since in the teaching and learning process, the assignments given by teachers are purposeful but not creative. The pedagogical approach assimilating ePortfolios makes its implementation more realistic and pedagogy with electronic portfolios can be used to design its artefacts. The conceptual framework of ePortfolio assessment is illustrated in Figure 1.1:

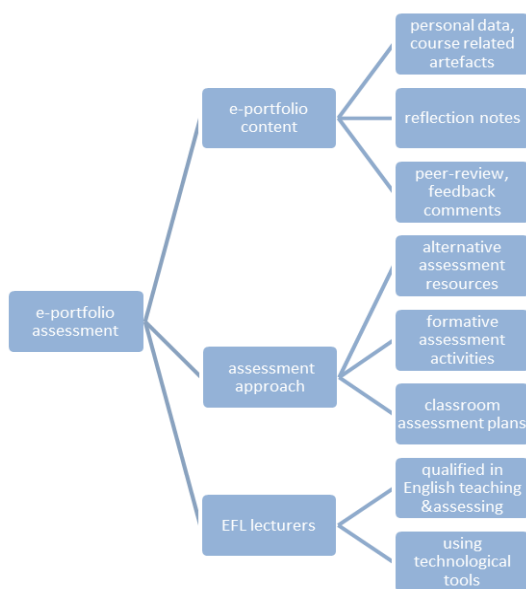


Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework of ePortfolio Assessment



The figure shows that electronic portfolio is conceptualised into a frame with three main parts, including ePortfolio itself with students personal files designed, course-related artefacts, reflection notes according to the learning objectives and feedback comments from peers and teachers. As the learner-centred evidence, their ePortfolios are guided by content and structure as shown above which articulates a section of conceptualised framework of ePortfolio-based assessment.

Coursework-related artefacts include students' works to showcase learning process. Meanwhile, they self-assess and reflect on learning objectives and tell the story of their own progress. Then students can describe and evaluate competence levels. Concretely, course-related artefacts consist of knowledge, skills and multimodal assignments demonstrating language performance and competence. In the reflection part, the student summarises and thinks about learning experiences with clarified learning objectives at the initial phase of classroom instruction embedded with electronic portfolios and formative assessment techniques. This structure will be assessed and evaluated in a formative way by qualified lecturers in language teaching and assessing as well as the digital tools.





To provide the evidence for assessing, the electronic portfolios or learning artefacts created by English learners from September 2021 to February 2022, should incorporate personal data and learning evidence, which is built comprehensively with the assignments, classroom notes, reflection on learning experiences, feedback comments, self-assessment and peer-assessment, presentations, group discussions, pair-work, questionnaires, classroom observations, quiz, tests and exams. As for the assessment, the formative classroom assessment techniques will be utilised for evaluating the producing procedures whereas a set of criteria will be the clarified for judging the products of learning artefacts in Microsoft Word Files. The final submission of learning artefacts can be revised according to the feedback, self and peer assessment elicited from criteria.

Electronic portfolios serve as learning process and foundations being provided for the assessment. In order to internalise language as a thought-speaking instrument, students are encouraged to communicate in dialogues between pair work and group work. It is essential as a component of the collaborative learning environment. The integration of technology and teaching activities may benefit learners and make them enjoy ePortfolio learning, which increase motivation, clarify learning goals, add value to learning and teaching. „As a practical alternative to test



or examination, ePortfolio is a digital container in demonstrating individual and collaborative improvement through storing texts, images, videos on a web-based setting (Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005).

Electronic portfolios also can be in the form of software tools. On the other hand, ePortfolios are capable of engaging learners in “recording, interpreting and evaluating their own learning, is the best learner” (Yancey, 2001, p. 83). For this study, students will be required to provide their learning evidence of each unit in the course. In the meantime, a variety of formative assessment techniques will be used to support learning and improve teaching. most importantly, learning, characterised as active, connective, reflective and successive, can be effectively facilitated by well-structured ePortfolios, guided reflection, systematic feedback and identity in digital literacy, which should be considered as key factors in the pedagogical approach or strategy. This furthers the statement of ePortfolio assessment in a coherent way.



1.6 Significance of Study

Wenger (1998) assumed that knowledge is relevant to the deemed valued practices, and knowing is process of active participating in the valued practices, and meaning is generated through this process. Practices hence are capable of shaping the knowledge, the knowing and the meaning-making process in classrooms. It also varies depending on different socio-cultural context. It is viable through ePortfolio-based learning evidence and assessment practices.



For policy makers, ePortfolio based assessment approach provide an ongoing, holistic and transparent means to assess students learning process and accomplishments in formative and authentic ways, complying with the rationale of educational assessment policy from the Chinese government. As to the curriculum developers, the study will explore the well-structured ePortfolio assessment and its implementation in EFL educational context, making contributions both to theory and practice for the instructional design and course-related activities, hence improving the courses taught at that institution.



The traditional instruction has been playing a prevailing role where students are the receiver of information transmitted from teachers (Kurian, 2022). The educators are safe in their leading role for teaching and assessment and students naturally tend to depend heavily on their teachers' instruction; many teachers do not know how to assess continuously and effectively, which types of assessment are suitable and cater for Chinese teachers and learners (Lam, 2019). Pedagogically, it poses significant transformative change such as student-centred learning, collaborative learning environment, and multiple assessment approaches to support teaching.

This study enriched ePortfolio assessment combined with formative method in an alternative and authentic way which is intended to serve learning and teaching quality in breadth and depth dimension. Student involvement and engagement were fully elaborated in this study. ePortfolios significantly broadened the insights of assessment model and practically highlight lecturers and EFL learners.

Evaluation and assessment are one of the key issues of educational evolution and reform. The education quality relies on the positive response to China-official documents. Educators should take more responsibility to centralise the role of



assessment. Actively participating in teaching and learning activities, EFL learners call for a process evaluation with more engagement in language learning. Some researchers believe that “electronic portfolios have the most significant effect on education since the introduction of formal schooling.” Portfolio is a useful mechanism for formative assessment and feedback. Bauma (2001) suggest that portfolio as a “valid, reliable and fair” means of assessment.

Teaching and assessment inform, improve and affect each other (Malone, 2013). Portfolio assessment, in nature, represents an alternative approach to language assessment and became central in classroom assessment practice (Shao-Ting & Hung, 2013). Additionally, it allows more agency in interaction as Hancock (1994) defines it as “an ongoing process involving the students and teachers in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection”. For the purpose of assessment, educator and assessors will be provided with an assessment model to highlight learner strengths and achievement (Hirvela & Pierson, 2000). Hence, both learners and instructors need to reform and enlarge scope and depth in language assessment by interweaving ePortfolios for a transparent and holistic insight. It is obliged for Chinese EFL educators to provide more opportunities to improve self-assessment in a more collaborative environment. The premium assessment practice





produces expected learning outcomes. In other words, teachers utilise the assessment as product not simply for final scores but as a process to encourage students with more efforts and commitment. ePortfolios display progress and accomplishments, which optimise the teaching and learning as a digitalised tool.

With this being the case, the study bridged the gap by exploring the well-structured ePortfolio assessment and its implementation in the EFL educational context, making contributions both to theory and practice for the benefits of learners and instructors. All the identified aspects internally and externally conceptualise the ePortfolio assessment framework within and beyond classroom practice. Moreover, this approach will enrich ePortfolio assessment combined with formative method in an alternative way which is intended to serve pedagogy design authentically and learning in width dimension. Broadly speaking, it positively and actively responds to government policy of educational evaluation and assessment.

By exploring the narrow but critical aspect, this research makes three significant contributions to the ePortfolio-based assessment. First, it affirms there is little use of ePortfolios aligned with formative assessment practice as an alternative to traditional assessment way in the EFL higher educational context in China in the lecturer-steered learning environment. The second contribution the research makes





is to reconceptualise the framework of ePortfolio-based assessment adaptive to EFL settings and introduce a transformative framework of ePortfolio-based assessment, including implementing procedures, guidelines, self-assessment checklist and ePortfolio Rubrics. The third and most important contribution to this field concerns overview of ePortfolio-based assessment design as well as procedural model of ePortfolio-based assessment implementation. The students are behaving as active learners and having a central role in their own learning journey. Assessment is a partnership and the practice is influenced by students as well as by the settings. By implication, the ePortfolio assessment model will be tentatively constructed in an adaptive manner and will open up new direction for future research. Briefly, deeper understanding of how to implement ePortfolio assessment serves learning and teaching quality in breadth and depth dimension, useful to policy-makers, educators and even assessment developers, in supporting assessment for learning.

