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Enabling New Forms of Peer-Assessment in Writing Classrooms: Students' Perceptions toward the Use of E-portfolios

تمكين أشكال جديدة لتقويم الأقران في أقسام التعبير الكتابي: تصورات الطلاب حول المحافظ الإلكترونية

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Abstract :

In English writing classrooms most teachers rely basically on traditional forms of assessment which focus on grades and not on developing the 21st century skills. This explanatory research, therefore, aimed to investigate the students' perceptions toward peer-assessment through electronic-portfolios (henceforth, e-portfolios) as a way to preserve the relationship between the necessary technological skills and the required pedagogical strategies. Thus, a structured questionnaire was administered to 60 students from Tebessa-University. For an in-depth analysis, a focus group interview was conducted with 08 participants. Positive Results have been recorded .

Keywords: Assessment; English; e-portfolios; peer-assessment; writing.

الملخص:

في أقسام التعبير الكتابي للغة الإنجليزية يعتمد معظم الأساتذة بشكل أساسي على أشكال التقويم التقليدية التي تركز مبدئيا على النقاط وليس على تطوير مهارات القرن الحادي والعشرين. بالتالي, يهدف هذا البحث التوضيحي إلى استقصاء تصورات الطلاب حول تقييم الأقران من خلال المحافظ الإلكترونية كوسيلة للحفاظ على العلاقة بين المهارات التكنولوجية الضرورية والاستراتيجيات التدريسية المطلوبة. وهكذا، تم تقديم استبيان منظم إلى 60 طالبا من جامعة تبسة. لإجراء تحليل متعمق، أجريت مقابلة جماعية مع 08 مشاركين. تم تسجيل نتائج إيجابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التقييم ؛ الانجليزية ؛ المحافظ الإلكترونية ؛تقييم الأقران ؛الكتابة.

INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, the writing skill is considered to be one of the basic language skills as it affords learners with a big opportunity to communicate in a written mode in order to address their abstract thoughts to particular readers. However, it has been widely established that writing in a context where English is not the students' first language is often quite problematic. Hence, this skill requires a careful assistance on the part of the teachers whose prime concern is not only to transmit knowledge but also to supply different strategies that would encourage them to write outside the classroom. Teachers as well, have to frequently assess their students' writing performances to check their progress rate, and this would be only achieved through the use of various tools of assessment. Tests, exams, interviews, homework assignments, journal logs, portfolios, conferencing, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and so forth are all good cases in point. Peer-assessment for instance, as being the core of the present small-scale study, is the process whereby students are the main responsible for their learning; they are the proofreaders who assume to provide feedback concerning their peers' written productions; therefore, they would learn from each others' suggestions and commentaries.

Perhaps what matters most in the Algerian context is that most teachers are confined of many old-fashioned methods of assessment. Teachers seem to rely more on the students' tests, exams scores, or homework as means for assessing their writing. Unfortunately; however, those forms often fail "…to assess deeper forms of learning" (Rousseau, 2018, p. 1). Hence, students are most often ending up mastering nothing concerning their writing skill, because they habitually memorize information which they only need the day of their official exam for the sake of getting good grades and not for the sake of improvement; that is the reason why they often forget everything a week later (Mazur, 2014), if not few hours later.

In today's globalized world, the shift from the outdated ways of assessment to a brand new ways becomes a must rather than a choice. So, within the throes of the 21st century, teachers have to adequately react to the situation by adjusting their way of assessing with due regard to the set of the future-ready skills. One way that can make that change possible is to support the idea of peer-assessment with the growing number of e-portfolios through which learners would be much more involved in their learning process by taking a shared responsibility for their own learning.

Given to that small account, the researchers have aimed to obtain an in-depth understanding of the students' views about using e-portfolios in writing classrooms. Consistently, The researchers have been interested in answering the following questions;

1. To what extent do university students perceive the concept of peer-assessment through e-portfolios?

2. Do university students welcome the idea of e-portfolios as an easy digital tool in writing assessment courses to bridge the gap that was left by paper-based portfolios?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Writing

Language learning and assessment are working hand in hand and since "writing is a form of learning" (Reid, 1993, p. 49), assessment becomes inevitable and should be correctly done especially when writing is taught in an English as a Foreign Langue context (henceforth EFL). Accordingly, Olshtain (2001, p. 207) has stated that "writing as a communicative activity needs to be encouraged and nurtured during the language learner's course of study". This definition highlights two key points; "the communicative nature of the writing skill" and "the significance of providing opportunities for students to achieve such an aim". So, by trying to bridge the two points, it has been found congruent if teachers help the students to ultimately become self-regulated, so that they will fulfill the nature of the writing skill through interactive activities.

2.2. Assessment

In the realm of education, assessment is considered a crucial component; it is the process of gathering and interpreting the students' performances in order to value their own progress through a particular period of time, to gauge the effectiveness of the teaching process or to recognize whether students have acquired what they have learned or still they have a problem

concerning a particular aspect of language (Brindley, 2001; Hyland, 2003; Browne, 2007; Boyle & Fisher, 2007; Chapelle & Brindley, 2010). In the same vein, Ashman and Conway (1997) have claimed that;

> Assessment is the process of collecting information about individuals to identify and confirm a problem, or to make decisions, assessment may involve information gathered from a test, or collecting other information that might comprise a folio of work, such as examples of […] writing over a year or more (p. 82).

2.3. Alternatives in Assessment

Before diving into more details, an important point needs to be clarified. The main reason behind including this title has been attributed to the fact that both peer-assessment and e-portfolios, as being the study major concern, are classified under the umbrella of alternatives forms of assessments. Hence, it has been felt the urge to refer to the phrase "alternatives in assessment", which stands for the new procedures that are considered to be new comers in the field of assessment. So, one could not use the term "*alternative assessments*" because it implies something new and different that may be "exempt from the requirements of responsible test construction and decision making" (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p. 657), but one should rather refer to it as "*alternatives in assessment*"; that is the reason why many advocates believe that "observations, self and peer-assessment, performance-based assessment, portfolios, journals, conferences, and interviews, etc." are all alternatives to standard tests and exams

(Brown & Hudson, 1998; Cohen, 2001; Brown, 2002).

2.3.1. Peer-assessment

"Best assessment Practice includes assessment by peers, instructors, and the student writer himself or herself" (O'Neil, Moore & Huot, 2009, p, 164). From this preliminary, one could understand how much important is the idea of self-reflection in the learning process. Peer-assessment, for instance, requires "… combining multiple perspectives on a performance and generating an overall assessment out of the combined descriptions of those multiple perspectives" (ibid.). So, within the tenets of this activity, students are supposed to critically reflect to their peers' suggestions.

In writing classrooms, for example, an acceptable piece of writing requires receiving multiple points of views to be well-thought-out. This concept has been emphasized by Anson (1999, as cited in Clark 2003, p. 156), who have claimed that "hearing other people's response to their work helps writers to develop a kind of internal monitor, a "reading self", which informs their decisions as they enter new and more sophisticated worlds of writing".

A large number of existing studies in the broader literature have raised many advantages concerning peer-assessment. As an illustration, Boston (2000) has pointed out that peer-assessment (a) can be beneficial for both assessors and assesses, (b) can raise the students' autonomy and higher order thinking skills, and (c) by assessing other's works students can gain some insights concerning their own works. It also provides "valuable opportunities for students to learn about their own ideas and

the quality of their work by carefully examining work samples produced by their peers" (Russell and Airasian, p. 110).

On the basis of what has been mentioned, we could say that peer-assessment could play a significant role in EFL writing classrooms; learners then would be able to "engage in social interaction" with their peers as a way to "… obtain assistance from them, and develop their writing abilities accordingly" (Lee, 2017, p.15). As such, scaffolding and feedback from peers have a key role to play in classroom writing assessment (ibid.). Actually, this form of assessment falls within the principles of Vygotsky's uprising theory of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD), which is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving […] under collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Thereby, under the umbrella of peer-assessment, learners are supposed to refine their written works according to their peers' comments. The principles of peer-assessment would then develop the students' self-evaluation skills and produce autonomous learners who are ready to manipulate their learning by their own, putting their learning above all, and thinking critically about each other's outcome whenever it is possible. Hence, building a solid learning community inside the classroom.

One important point that needs to be considered is that, assessment in general is sometimes restricted by time and monetary costs (Williams, 2003). The former reflects the time-consuming nature of such activity especially in an EFL context. The latter;

however, is related to the monetary costs which significantly occurs "… as the number of students increases…" (p. 307). From this small account, one could understand that the author has alluded to paper-based portfolios, where students need to make copies at each time they produce a written output to be dispatched to their peers. This limitation; therefore, could be overcame by the so-called e-assessment. Within the principles of this latter, both teachers and students will save their pockets as everything will be electronic.

Teachers are able as well to use some Software which are "…specifically designed for team writing and editing" and allow both of them (teachers and students) to "…post colored notes on a draft with suggestions for revision" (Williams, 2003, p. 170). An important thing to mention here, is that assessors are not obliged to post colored notes, they could also post verbal messages concerning some writing gaps. What matters most in this case is that the very heart of such cyberspaces lies in creating the sense of *community connections* inside an EFL classroom. The following figure better demonstrates the concept. Figure 1, depicts the three overlapping lenses; community, learner centered, and assessment centered. So, learner-centeredness would pave the way for the students to assess each other's work, and thus creating a union community inside the classroom. These three lenses would then characterize any learning situation.
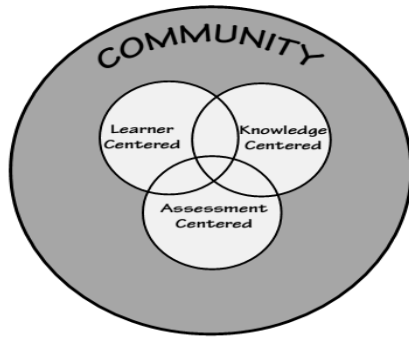
Figure 1. Classroom Community (Bransford, Vye, Baateman, Brophy, Roselli, 2004, p. 214)

The three lenses; learner centered, assessment centered, and community centered, are better explained below,

- Learner centered (in the sense of connecting to the strengths, interests, and preconceptions of learners and helping them learn about themselves as learners),
- Assessment centered (in the sense of providing multiple opportunities to make students' thinking visible so they can receive feedback and be given chances to revise),
- Community centered (in the sense of providing an environment—both within and outside the classroom—where students feel safe to ask questions, learn to use technology to access resources and work collaboratively, and are helped to develop lifelong learning skills) (Bransford, Vye, Baateman, Brophy, Roselli, 2004, pp. 214, 215).

2.3.2. Electronic Portfolios

Broadly speaking, portfolio is the collection of the students' writing samples that are written over time, they can include both drafts (even multiple drafts) and final products, thus students will become able to see their own improvements (Herman,

Aschbacher, & Winters, 1992; Genesee & Upshur, 1996; Brown & Hudson, 1998; Kern, 2000; Weigle, 2002; Hyland, 2003; Russel, 2012; Caspary & Boothe, 2017; Lam, 2018). They may even "represent a different type of writing—for instance, one could be a narrative or descriptive or expressive piece, the second a formal essay, and the third an analysis of a prose text" (Cohen, 2001, p. 534). Portfolios would then encourage students to reflect on their own writing. The purpose behind the use of portfolios is summarized in the acronym "**CRADLE**" which stands for; **C**ollecting, **R**eflecting, **A**ssessing, **D**ocumenting (portfolio is an important document in demonstrating students achievement), **L**inking (portfolio can serve as an important link between students and their peers), and **E**valuation (Gottlieb, 1995).

Since many EFL teachers are always complaining about the significant pressure that they do face inside their writing classrooms, here we mean the fact they are adhered to finish the given program by a given period of time. E-portfolios, or as Lam (2018) has called it; "digital portfolios or web-based portfolios", can be used as an alternative way that can save the teachers' time and fit the learners' schedule. It has been believed that e-portfolios, can "simplify the process of collecting, storing, and sharing samples of student work collected over time or intended to document achievement of specific learning goals" (Russel, 2012, p. 362). Indeed, it is with these electronic platforms that teachers

> …can hold a large sample of student work without requiring more storage space or causing clutter in the classroom. With digital files, the teacher no longer must move large

stacks of paper or sets of folders when reviewing a set of portfolios. Instead, the portfolios can be accessed anywhere a computer is available" (ibid.).

In Russel (2012) definition we can see that he has emphasized the fact of the availability of a computer to make e-assessment possible. Fortunately; however, with the recent technological development, students and teachers alike have had that ablity to use a variety of other electronic devices to access their electronic portfolios (e.g., Tablets, Mobile-phones, iPads, and so forth.).

An important point to be mentioned here is that e-portfolios could offer the educational context with nearly the same options as paper-based portfolios, as the e-portfolios "… have all of the pedagogical advantages of paper portfolios along with the advantages of portability and the possibility for nonprint artifacts" (Neff-Lippman, 2012, p. 148).

2.3.3. Blog-based Writing Assessment

Since the lens of this paper is purely technological, it is then worth mentioning that different wikis, blogs (e.g., WordPress, Pathbrite, BlogSpot, etc.), and Social Networking Sites (SNS's) (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, etc.), can be used as authentic cyberspaces to paper-based assessment. These cyberspaces can enable the students to publish their papers for teacher-student discussions, or peer-discussion. Thus, through all those online platforms, learners can be engaged in active interaction so as to build social bonds and thus fulfil one of the main principles of peer-assessment. In this respect, Lee (2017, p. 124) has pointed out

that,

> Technology-enhanced writing tasks involve both technical and social elements– the former mainly Web 2.0 and the latter involving broader understanding of the role of audience in writing. With social networking, online publishing can provide a powerful source of incentives for writing.

2.4. Advantages of E-portfolios Assessment

In the light of what has been previously mentioned, it has been proved that there is a number of advantages that e-portfolios may offer to the educational context. Johnson-Sheehan and Paine (2016) have stated several advantages. They are listed as follows:

- They can be accessed from any networked computer.
- They can include multimedia text such as movies, presentations, and links to web sites you have created.
- They can include scanned-in documents that show comments that others have handwritten on your work.
- They provide interactivity for the reader. For example, the reflective letter can link directly to the documents in the portfolio or to items on the internet.
- They can be updated easily, and older versions can be archived. (p. 535)

Kern (2000) as well, has highlighted an important feature concerning e-portfolios, he has said that through such spaces "…writers can easily move chunks of text from one location to another and make editing changes without disrupting the visual flow of the document" (p. 224).

It is clear from what has been preceded that e-assessment is gaining prominence in the educational context, as many researchers have tried to demonstrate the different advantages that could this latter brings to the educational milieu.

3. Research Methodology Design

3.1. The Choice of the Method

As the intention of the current study tries to unveil the students' perceptions concerning e-assessment. This research; therefore, can be described as qualitative in nature, and since we have used at first some quantitative data, it can be considered to be a descriptive one as well. Thus, this small endeavour has followed the explanatory research design from the mixed-methods approach. This latter, is concerned with the collection and analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative data which are going to further explain number data (Creswell, 2015; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). According to Creswell (2014),

> The researcher bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides on understanding of a research problem. The study begins with a broad survey in order to generalize results to a population and then focuses, in a second phase, on detailed qualitative, open-ended interviews to collect detailed views from participants to help explain the initial quantitative survey (p. 19).

It can be seen that this research paper has been carried without establishing a hypothesis. In fact, it has been purposefully done for the simple reason that the subject of educational technology and especially e-

assessment has been considered as a new comer in the Algerian educational context, so there is little or no prior knowledge about the subject matter which can help us to build a hypothesis upon which the problem should be verified; that is the reason why we have been neutral.

3.2. Participants

Participants of the current study were 60 Master students enrolled in Cheikh Larbi Tebessa University (Algeria) during the academic year 2018/2019. The sample has been composed of 25 males and 35 females; their age ranges between 22 and 30 years old. Our aim behind choosing Master students refers to the fact that they have spent many years (nearly 12 years) learning the English language; so they could have experienced the subject under study or at least have had a large overview concerning our interest.

3.3. Data Collection

The data of the present study have been collected using both a questionnaire followed up with a focus group interview. As for the quantitative method, a questionnaire has been designed in accordance with the survey, which is a procedure in quantitative research. It stands for collecting data through interviews or questionnaires to describe the attitudes, opinions, characteristics of a particular population (Creswell, 2012; Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun, 2015). According to Cohen et al. (2018) "the questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, able to be administered without the presence of the

researcher and often comparatively straightforward to analyse" (p. 471).

In accordance with the nature of the study, it was seen compatible to collect data through a web-based survey site, which can be used through the many online Internet survey templates including; SurveyMonkey (The one that we have used in the present study), Zoomerang, Free Online Surveys, SmartSurvey, Survey Planet and Google Forms, all of which tend to overcome spatial and temporal constraints (ibid.). Therefore, the questionnaire has been sent to the participants via emails and Facebook. It has mainly consisted of 10 closed questions which have been classified into five dimensions of questions:

1. Students' view concerning forms of assessments.
2. Students' Knowledge of e-assessments.
3. Students' experience with e-assessment.
4. Students' attitudes toward e-assessment.
5. Students' experience with paper-based portfolios.
6. Students' perceptions of the potential benefits of e-portfolios as a means of e-assessment.

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, it has been felt necessary that our study should include a deep understanding of the students' perceptions about e-assessment. That is why, the researchers have urged the students to express themselves in their own words, and thus giving an ample opportunity to each of the participants to be heard. Therefore, a focus group interview has been seen appropriate to be used. It is, through, that kind of interviews that the participants would feel more comfortable and dig deeper in the target topic.

Trying to keep in pace with the digital nature of the present paper, we have conducted an online focus interview; so everything will be compatible and falls within the same sphere. According to Cohen et al. (2018) the online focus interview took several forms; chief among them, text-based through social networking sites. Accordingly, we have created a Facebook-Messenger group in which we have added all the participants (we mean the 08 participants) in order to facilitate the process of gathering information, and thus, we have saved time and shrinking the spaces due to the fact that most of the students leave far away; in addition to the students' strike during the academic year 2018/2019; which has made it difficult, if not impossible to directly meet them. In fact, it is through such virtual platform, students have felt free to express themselves and they have avoided the possibility of being shy as in face-to-face interviews.

Before going any further, it is worth noting the fact of making the interview with just 08 participants. Our choice has been attributed to many reasons; chief among them, (a) its feasibility with that number of students; as that type of interviews can usually be more manageable with that number of interviewees (Krueger & Casey, 2015), (b) the participants busy schedule, and (c) the students' inability to afford an internet connection in any possible manner. The researchers have also felt that this number of students can be sufficient to gain insightful information concerning the new way of assessment. The interview has took approximately 40 minutes and it has enclosed 4 open-ended questions, which

have aimed to unveil the following three broad headings.

1. Knowledge of peer-assessment.
2. Comparison between e-portfolios and paper-based portfolios.
3. Attitudes toward peer assessment in an electronic environment.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Quantitative Data

4.1.1. Students' View Concerning Forms of Assessment

In accordance with the respondents' answers, it can be seen in figure 2 that tests, exams and homework are the most used means of assessment at the university level. They seem to be the only yardstick for assessing the students' writing. While, other forms like self-assessment and peer-assessment are totally ignored and left behind. The participants' answer might be attributed to the fact that many teachers find it easy to assess their students' work through tests and exams. That is, instead of doing each task individually, we mean, assessment and exams or quizzes, they do it together as a way to save time and energy.
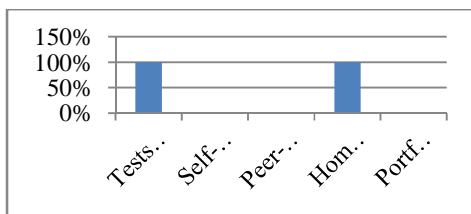
Figure 2. University Teachers' forms of assessment

4.1.2. Students' Knowledge of E-assessments

As it is illustrated in figure 3, we could say that the majority of the

respondents had a broad idea about what e-assessment is. It can be seen that they have equally selected the different given choices, in that nearly an equal number of students see e-assessment as e-journals, online tests, online portfolios, and others commented that this concept stands for all of the above options. As for those who have selected "*online tests*", their answer has revealed their experience with the most used form of assessment "tests" in their standard form with which they are familiar with. So, they have considered "online tests" as an equivalent term to the traditional "tests", the only difference lies between pens and papers versus keyboards and screens.
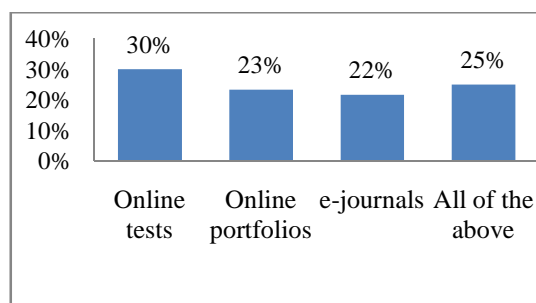
Figure 3. Students' Interpretation of E-Assessment

4.1.3. Students' Experience with E-assessment

With regard to figure 4, it is obvious that the majority of the respondents had no experience with the so-called e-assessment, and just 5% which stands for 3 students answered that they have experienced such form of assessment.
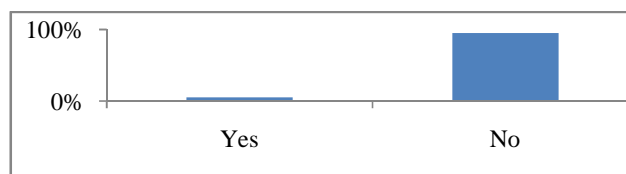
Figure 4. Students' Experience with e-assessment

4.1.4. Students' Attitudes toward E-

assessment

In the following figure, the data have showed that the majority of the respondents are sharing the same positive attitudes toward e-assessment. To them, e-assessment is a valuable tool that may supply immediate feedback, allows students to work in a non-threatened environment where they would feel at ease when interacting with each other since they will be behind the screens negotiating meaning. They see as well, that e-assessment can help them avoiding the fact of going back to their written collection.
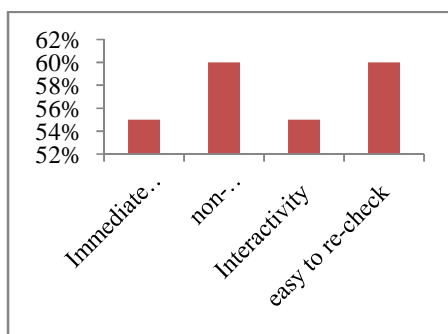

Figure 5. Students' Perception about e-assessment

4.1.5. Students' Experience with Paper-based Portfolios

According to the results demonstrated in figure 6, it can be seen that a great number of respondents had had an experience with paper-based portfolio mainly in the secondary school. On the one hand, the data have showed that this form of assessment is totally ignored in the Algerian universities. On the other hand, in secondary schools, it has been often seen as a collection of written composition which are compiled in one folder and put at the end of the classroom, or in the teachers' room without giving too much thought to what is inside (personal observation), they are

(portfolios) often made as an administrative and pedagogical procedure. Unfortunately; however, the students' written productions were rarely given back to the students in order to see their progress throughout the term or the year.
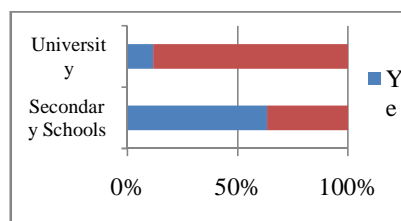

Figure 6. Students' Experience with Paper-based Portfolios

4.1.6. Students' Perceptions of the Potential Benefits of E-portfolios

Based on the students' experience with paper-based portfolios, we have asked the students about their "*perceptions of the potential benefits of e-portfolios*". According to the results that have been demonstrated in figure 7, we could say that students have showed a zeal toward such digital concept. They have considered this type of assessment as a mean that could raise their motivation, save their energy, space, time, and even could facilitate the process of refinement which is usually seems to be a heavy workload. In fact, the refinement issue has been widely discussed among researchers. Quite recently, Roberts, Maor and Herrington (2016), have claimed that usually the "digital formats are easy to rearrange and edit" (p. 22) comparing to paper-based formats. In this respect, Stefani, Mason and Pegler (2007), have emphasized that within a digital framework students are, now, able to "search on and access content in a non-linear fashion. They can make modifications on a regular basis to suit their needs and the expectations and requirements

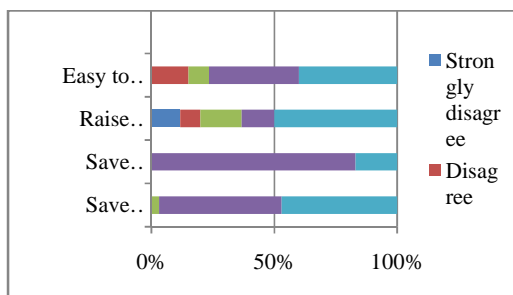of different audiences" (p. 17) (peers in this context).

Figure 7. What do you think about e-portfolios?

4.2. Qualitative Data

In this section, the researchers have followed the content analysis as a research method for interpreting the qualitative data, through which they have opted coding as an approach to analyse the obtained data. Cohen et al. (2018) have claimed that coding is "the process of breaking down segments of text data into smaller units […], and then examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data" (p. 668). So, the respondents' answers have been coded and interpreted as follows:

4.2.1. Electronic Storage and Portability

As opposed to paper-based portfolios, respondents have believed that e-portfolios can offer them a high quality of storage, wherein their composition can be in safe with little or no possibility of being damaged or lost, besides to the fact of retrieving previous works with just one click from the 'palm of their hands' at anytime and in everywhere.

In fact, the obtained findings are consistent to a far extent with the results of a number of researchers; chief among them Stefani, Mason and Pegler who have

claimed that the non-electronic portfolios are usually overburdening the student; that is the reason why e-portfolios come to replace the paper-based ones by "… a set of digital files which can be transported and transferred with ease. The e-portfolio can be accessed and used in a variety of locations and can be replicated and shared with others. It is portable and mobile" (p. 18). Central to this definition is portability which is considered to be one of the main advantages of the e-portfolios.

4.2.2. Virtual-Interaction Confidence

Discussing in peers usually inhibit learners to interact at ease and freely expressing themselves. In this respect, respondents have argued that due to some psychological barriers, they usually avoid face-to-face discussions; for example, they find it too difficult to speak in English inside the classroom with their peers for reviewing purposes; that is the reason why they see that discussions which take place from keyboards to screens can raise their confidence and thus facilitating peer-interaction. To them, such virtual spaces can raise their confidence and reduce the factor of shyness which is usually presented in peers-discussion especially for introvert learners who are usually quiet during classroom conversations. The following excerpt better exemplifies,

Excerpt [Student F]:

"*In my case, I'm that kind of learners who do their homework but never give the answers, I'm that kind of students who have good suggestions, but never provide them to my peers for the simple reason that I'm a shy student who becomes speechless in such situations; however, when it comes to*

participate in an e-activity, I think I can do it without any hesitation or procrastination, and I think I can give more than I did. I'm sure I can be more productive because when chatting with my friends on Facebook for example I became more talkative not as in usual situations (here by "usual situations", the student absolutely means in a face-to-face discussion".

4.2.3. Digital Natives

Being competent users of technology and being familiarized with the variegated technological gadgets have made the learners expect positive outcomes concerning the use of e-portfolios as authentic digital tools in writing assessment. The following excerpt better clarifies,

Excerpt [Student B]:

"*Before, when we were working with paper-based portfolios, our compositions were not that much in safe, because most of the times hard copies are easy to lose, hard to find, and hard to edit as well; however, within an electronic version of portfolios, our compositions can be much more in safe simply because we can first, make many backups, control everything from the palm of our hands, and second in case of losing our compositions, we are also able to recover them by using the different data recovery programs*".

On the basis of the aforementioned excerpts, one could recognize from the first one, how much tech-savvy our learners are. In fact, their answers have showed their skillfulness in technology. This implies, that such technological concept (e-portfolios) can run well if applied appropriately in our writing classrooms. The second one; however, was clearly correspondent with

Chun (1994) findings, who has found that in a computer networking learning environment, introvert learners; those quieter and shyer ones become the most "prolific". That is, these kind of learners become more active and more productive, because they are not in a direct contact with their interlocutor.

From the obtained findings, it has been found that the general opinions safely encouraged us to claim that the students' prior experience with paper-based portfolios have allowed them to make a clear cut line between the two concepts. Through identifying the paper-based portfolios different shortcomings, they have expected positive outcomes as far as the concept e-portfolios is concerned. To them, these expectations can bridge the gap that has been left by the standard form of portfolios. So, by reaching this point in research, the researchers have came to answer the addressed questions stated earlier.

The first research question "to what extent do university students perceive the concept of peer-assessment through e-portfolios?" has attempted to elicit the students' perceptions towards the concept of peer-assessment along with e-portfolios. Generally speaking, it has been found that the students' familiarity with the technology use has had a direct impact on shaping their mind toward the concept e-assessment in a positive manner. They have believed that because they are technology-minded individuals, they can be able to monitor their learning in a web-based environment considerably easier than a in a face-to-face environment.

The second research question "do university students welcome the idea of e-portfolios as an easy digital tool in writing

assessment courses to bridge the gap that was left by paper-based portfolios?" has attempted to compare the students' perceptions towards e-portfolios with due regard to their experience with the conventional form of portfolios. From the obtained data, one can say that prior to the students' experience with paper-based portfolios, they have been able to recognize their requirements; in terms of what they really need (e.g., portability or the easy refinement). Consequently, their requirements can be met within the tenets of e-portfolios. To them, e-portfolios can lead to positive outcomes. Thus, the aforementioned research question has been positively answered.

5. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, this paper has presented some of the related literature, besides; it has discussed the students' perceptions about the topic under study. Now, the researchers are able to say that technology has changed the way of doing everything, and education is no exception. In this increasingly globalized world, it is, now, possible for teachers to update their methods, techniques, and ways of teaching to meet the 21st century requirements in order to prepare the learners as future citizens to be the only owner of their learning, and thus being able to survive in a world of globalization. Yet, technology-based approaches are not the panacea of assessment issues, but still can be used as innovative tools to meet the students basic requirements. If it is appropriately used, it would pave the way for both teachers and students to teach and learn outside the classroom four walls; where there will be no place for old-fashioned ways of teaching and learning.

As far as the generalizability is concerned, though the study findings cannot be generalized. However, they can serve as a base for future studies that is why more data are still needed to make a conclusive statement concerning the aforementioned concept. Accordingly, future researchers are invited to conduct full-scale studies to fully understand the implications of e-portfolios in EFL writing classrooms.

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