



Omani EFL Teachers' and Students' Views on the Current Practices of the Student's Portfolio

Eman Saleh Al-Kindi

Ministry of Education

Abdo Mohamed Al-Mekhlafi *

Sultan Qaboos University

Saleh Salim Al-Busaidi

Sultan Qaboos University

Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' and students' views on the current practices of the student's portfolio in terms of teacher's purposes, students' purposes, teachers' roles and students' roles. The study sample included 953 EFL students and 258 teachers in the Sultanate of Oman. Data was collected using questionnaires. The major findings of the present study were that both teachers and students used the student's portfolio for achieving a variety of purposes; however, the roles that they played might not lead to the achievement of these purposes. Generally speaking, teachers rarely played their roles in implementing the student's portfolio. The results indicated that teachers hardly prepared their students to implement the student's portfolio and they assessed their students' portfolios at a moderate level. Regarding students, it was found that the students rarely participated in making decisions about their portfolios and they rarely prepared themselves to complete the portfolios. The most frequent role that they played in preparing their portfolios was to keep all materials, tasks and activities in their portfolios.

Keywords: portfolio, implementation, teachers' role, students' role

INTRODUCTION

The student's portfolio is implemented by the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman as a tool to assess students' progress and develop independent learning skills (Ministry of Education, 2013a). Therefore, the Ministry has made efforts towards setting guidelines to implement the student's portfolio. The guidelines are defined clearly in the curriculum and assessment documents. The student's portfolio is described in the teacher's book as a tool to document students' work. More specifically, it is defined as "an ongoing collection of a child's work" (Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 3). The content and the process of portfolio assessment are stated in the curriculum and assessment documents.

In spite of the benefits of the students' portfolios as revealed in the literature and MoE assessment and curriculum documents, there is insufficient use of this educational tool. Al-Kharusi et al. (2014) stated that teachers used a variety of assessment tools; however, their main purpose is for grading and motivating students to learn. The aim of continuous assessment is not to award grades alone. The Ministry of Education (2013 b) has introduced the continuous assessment to serve many aims such as developing higher-order thinking skills and enhancing independent learning skills. However, not all of these aims have been achieved in a desirable way according to The Drive for Quality document published by Ministry of Education and the World Bank in 2012. Moreover, based on the experience of the researchers in teaching, it was noticed that the portfolio is like a container to save students' documents and a way to present students' work to committees that visit the school.

The Purpose of the study

The present study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' and students' views on the current practices of the student's portfolio in terms of teacher's purposes, students' purposes, teachers' roles and students' roles. It also explored the gender differences among teachers and students in their practices of the student's portfolios.

The following research questions were explored in this study.

- What are the current practices of the student's portfolio in terms of its purposes and roles as viewed by EFL teachers?
- What are the current practices of the student's portfolio in terms of its purposes and roles as viewed by EFL students?

CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementing the student's portfolio is well known and developed in European and other countries but has not been fully addressed in the Omani context. To the researchers' knowledge, there are two studies that investigated the portfolios. One of them is a quasi-experimental research study conducted by Al-Qutaiti (2011) which investigated the effectiveness of web-based portfolios in improving teachers' abilities in reflecting and enhancing their critical thinking skills. However, the study focused on teachers' portfolios so it is worthy to carry out research to investigate the current practices of the student's portfolio from both teachers' and students' perspectives. Al-Weshahi (2014) conducted another quasi-experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of implementing a process portfolio as a writing assessment method in improving grade eleven female students' writing performance. The researcher explored implementing the process writing portfolio model for the first time in the Omani context. However, the current practices of the student's portfolio as viewed by teachers and students have not been investigated.

Understanding the current situation of the student's portfolio will help find out the reasons behind not achieving the intended outcomes. This will help improve the way we deal with students' portfolios and enable us to maximize the benefits of implementing the portfolio for both teachers and learners. Portfolios used portfolios to present their best

work such as pictures and drawings that represented their styles and skills. Portfolios were used as a showcase to promote their work to customers and employers. Similar to the artists' purpose of compiling a portfolio, the student's portfolio has been implemented in language learning. It was used to showcase students' work. Mabry (1999) defined a portfolio as a "collection of information by and about a student to give a broader view of his/her achievement" (p. 17). Mabry's definition is broad and general. Arter and Spandel (1992) considered portfolios as a purposeful collection of students' work gathered over a period of time to show students' efforts, progress and achievements.

Quite similarly, Paulson and Meyer (1991) defined a portfolio as "a purposeful collection of a student's work that exhibits the students' efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas" (p. 16). The previous two definitions indicate that the collection of the students' work has to be for a purpose to be achieved. It is not only an exhibition of their work and it cannot be an assembly of work selected randomly. The selected work has to provide an evidence of students' progress, strengths and weaknesses.

In addition to having a purpose for compiling a portfolio, Baron and Boschee (1995) state that the students' work has to reflect students' achievements against stated outcomes. Baron and Boschee (1995) defined a portfolio as "... collections of students' works that provide tangible evidence of their knowledge, abilities and academic progress in relation to established outcomes" (p. 67). The portfolio is not only a folder of students' work but there is a need for collaboration between teachers and students to compile a portfolio. Tierney, Carter and Desai (1991) defined the students' portfolios as "...collections of both teachers and students' work and it is a commitment to student involvement in self-evaluation and helping students to become aware of their own development as readers and writers" (p. 41). This definition stated that students ought to be involved actively in evaluating their development and progress by conducting self-evaluation. As a result, it helped students develop the sense of awareness towards their learning.

Peers could also participate in implementing the student's portfolio. Simon and Forgette-Giroux (2000) had emphasized this element as they defined a portfolio as a "cumulative and an ongoing collection of entries that are selected and commented on by the student, the teacher and/or peers to assess the students' progress in the development of a competency" (p.86).

In addition to involving students to participate in evaluating their work, reflection is another area that needed more attention in compiling a portfolio. Delett, Barnhardt and Kevorkian (2001) provided another definition of the student's portfolio to focus on students' reflection. They defined it as a "portrait of what students know and what they can do, offer a multidimensional perspective of student progress overtime, encourage student self-reflection and participation and link instruction and assessment" (p.559).

Winsor and Ellefson (1995) defined the student's portfolio according to process and product. They defined it as a "process of reflection, selection, rationalization and evaluation, together with the product of those processes"(p.68). Lo (2010) pointed out that the student's portfolio is considered as an effective tool to integrate pedagogy,

learning and evaluation. Therefore, the current research would consider the student's portfolio as a tool that is used to serve teaching, learning and assessment purposes.

Such definitions and wide uses of student portfolio correspond to the purposes of implementing them. Barton and Collins (1993) stated that "the first and most significant act of portfolio preparation is the decision of the purpose for the portfolio"(p. 203). Therefore, it is essential to state the purpose of implementing the student's portfolio. There is no specific purpose for portfolios. Many researchers presented different purposes for implementing the portfolio. Cameron, Tate, MacNaughton and Politano (1997) and Elbow (1986) stated that portfolios are used by teachers and students to show students' growth over time. Teachers use the student's portfolio to provide them with assessment information about their students which would guide them in instructional decision-making (Arter & Spandel, 1992).

The content of student portfolio takes various forms. Moss et al. (1992) noted that the student's portfolio has to be used as a comprehensive picture of the students' learning. Therefore, the student's portfolio should include portfolio tasks and activities from the beginning of the school year or from even previous years to show the developmental process of the students learning. Consequently, the student's portfolio should include different and varied samples of students' work gathered over time.

The content of the student's portfolio may be determined according to the purpose behind it. Samkin and Francis (2008) stated that the student's portfolio used in their undergraduate financial accounting course was divided into five main sections. These sections included personal journals, modules summaries, classroom assessment techniques, mini-cases, a summary and a reflection. Classroom assessment techniques were a self-monitoring log, a feedback form, a one minute paper, free writing, and know-what-learn (K-W-L).

Evidence of students' reflection has to be included in the student's portfolio (Arter & Spandel, 1992). O'Malley and Pierce (1996) added another important part which is self-assessment. They claimed that without reflection and self-assessment, the student's portfolio will not achieve its real outcomes which are developing students' language skills and moving towards being more autonomous learners. Crockette (1998) added that besides samples of reflection and self-assessment, the student's portfolio has to include samples of class assignments, students' work that have been revised, edited and rewritten and portfolio projects.

Campell, Melenyzer, Nettles and Wyman (2000) presented other essential components that should be included in the student's portfolio which are a table of contents with page numbers and a personal introduction to the portfolio. The introduction should include the students' background, learning experience and outcomes that the students aimed to achieve from implementing the portfolio. Lu (2005) listed some main components of the student's portfolio which are self-assessment, teachers' and parents' feedback, self-made artefacts, daily or weekly English diaries, group projects and homework assignments.

With regard to teachers' roles in Implementing the student's portfolio, teachers should be aware of the importance of both preparing students for the implementation of the

student's portfolio and the importance of assessing the students' portfolios. One of the main roles of the teachers is to support students in the whole process of implementing the student's portfolio. Psychological, methodological and technical support has to be provided to students. Teachers should motivate students to work in the new experience of implementing the portfolio by using different support and reinforcement strategies. Consequently, their comfort level will be raised. In order to make students more comfortable and less frustrated, they should be aware of the methodology and technology that they are going to follow in implementing the portfolio (Mok, 2012).

Yang (2003) proposed some steps that teachers have to follow to prepare students for better implementation of the student's portfolio. Teachers have to develop mini-lessons to provide sufficient guidelines for the implementation of the portfolios. The content, purpose, and the assessment criterion of the student's portfolio should be discussed in these mini-lessons. Burksaitiene (2011) mentioned that teachers have to train students also to do self-assessment and reflection as they are considered as important parts of the student's portfolio. This can be done by providing students with worksheets that enabled them to practice self-assessment and reflection.

In assessing the student's portfolio, peer feedback is considered as a vital and useful strategy (Liu & Carless, 2006; Sadler, 2010). Yang (2003) mentioned that teachers have to arrange time for peer review and encourage students to share their portfolios with each other to get feedback. Moreover, teachers have to help learners establish and carry feedback by encouraging them to arrange meetings or conferences with their peers. In these conferences, they are going to give each other comments on their portfolios, exchange and comment on their teacher's feedback and exchange suggestions for better improvement (Berne, 2009; Hounsell, 2008). Feedback is considered as one of the essential components of assessment. It plays a role in scaffolding students and supporting them in their learning if it is used in the right way (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). There are different forms of feedback such as grades, marks, written and oral comments and non-verbal gestures that can be done within the classroom (Sadler, 2010). Therefore teachers have to allocate specific time for assembling the portfolios to give students written feedback. In addition to the teacher's written feedback, teachers have to allow time to evaluate the student's portfolio orally by meeting students individually, in pairs or in groups (Escobar & Gibbs, as cited in Martinez-Lirola & Rubio, 2009).

With respect to students' roles in implementing the student's portfolio, literature reveal that students have to be aware of their responsibilities in compiling their portfolios. Therefore, they have to take a role in making decisions in what to include in their portfolios. Singh and Samad (2013) stated that students have to participate in selecting the content of their portfolios purposefully. They have to reflect on the selected documents by stating what they have learnt from them and reasons for including them in their portfolios. By conducting this reflection, students will take responsibility of their learning by paying attention to their weaknesses and strengths.

Escobar & Gibbs pointed out that learners have to write their learning objectives that they aimed to achieve from implementing the portfolio clearly. Accordingly, students had to

take a role in designing portfolio activities that match with those objectives (as cited in Martinez-Lirola & Rubio, 2009).

Students should have a role in preparing themselves for implementing the portfolio. They should not be passive learners in receiving everything from their teachers. They have to refer to websites to learn more about compiling a portfolio successfully and get more suggestions and solutions that direct them in dealing with any obstacles that they might face during the implementation of the student's portfolio (Burksaitiene, 2011).

METHOD

Research design

This is a descriptive study that collected data of student's portfolio in Omani EFL public education setting. A teachers' questionnaire and a students' questionnaire were developed by the researcher to gather the needed data to answer the research questions.

Sample of the study

The sample of the study was drawn from EFL cycle two basic education students and teachers. Questionnaires were distributed randomly to 300 basic education teachers. The returned questionnaires were 265 questionnaires. Seven out of the 265 were discarded for being incomplete. Thus, 258 questionnaires were used for analysis in this study- the 258 teachers, 130 were males and 128 were females. With regard to the students' sample, questionnaires were distributed randomly to 1200 students. The returned questionnaires were 1013 questionnaires. Sixty out of 1013 were discarded for being incomplete and invalid for analysis. Thus, the questionnaires used for analysis in the present study were 953. Out of the 953 students, 477 were males and 476 were females.

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data for the study. The first instrument was a questionnaire distributed to cycle two teachers to answer the questions related to teachers' views on their purposes and roles in implementing the student's portfolio, facilitators of the student's portfolio and gender differences in the purposes, roles and factors respectively. Similarly, the second instrument was the students' questionnaire related to students' views on their purposes, roles and factors that facilitate the implementation of the student's portfolio.

The survey questionnaires were developed by the researchers of the present study by reviewing the literature about the practices of implementing the student's portfolio as well as reviewing the documents of the Ministry of Education. Prior to administering the instruments, they were checked for validity and reliability using proper accurate procedures. They were reported to be valid and highly reliable.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To explore the current practices of the student's portfolio, four areas were investigated: teachers' purposes, students' purposes, teachers' roles and students' roles in implementing the student's portfolio.

Teachers' purposes for implementing the student's portfolio

The mean scores obtained were categorized for interpreting the results as follows:

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
4.5-5	3.5-4.4	2.5-3.4	1.5-2.4	1-1.4

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Purposes for Implementing the Student's portfolio

Statement	Mean	SD
Teachers used the student's portfolio to:		
1. enable them to assess their students on a regular basis	4.38	.72
2. assess their students' performance fairly	4.23	.81
3. get feedback on their instruction	4.20	.63
4. help their students follow their development over time	4.19	.75
5. enable their students to reflect on their learning	4.00	.89
6. improve the interaction between them and their students	3.99	.83
7. help their students assess their learning regularly	3.98	.88
8. help increase students' willingness to learn actively	3.97	.87
9. enhance learners' motivation to learn English language	3.94	.85
10. develop their students' organizational skills	3.88	.95
11. encourage their students to work collaboratively	3.80	.89
12. foster the development of learner autonomy	3.71	.92
13. encourage their students to develop independent learning strategies	3.71	1.08
14. develop their students' planning skills	3.66	.92
15. help their students carry their foreign language learning beyond the confines of the classroom	3.62	.99
16. foster their students' critical thinking skills	3.51	.91
Overall	3.92	.57

Table 1 clearly reveals that teachers took into consideration all the purposes while implementing the student's portfolio although some purposes scored higher than the other (overall mean, 3.92). The means ranged between 3.51 and 4.38. That showed that teachers used the student's portfolio for a variety of purposes.

Item no. 1 which is "enable them to assess their students on a regular basis" received the highest mean (4.38), followed closely by item no. 2 "assess their students' performance fairly" (mean 4.23). Both of these two purposes were related to using the student's portfolio as a tool for assessment. This indicated that teachers used the student's portfolio mainly for assessment purposes. Item no. 3 which is related to getting feedback on teachers' instruction was another purpose that followed directly the previous assessment purposes with a high mean of 4.2.

The remaining purposes were related to learning area. Their means ranged between 3.51 and 4.19 which are considered as high. Item no. 4 which is "help their students follow their development over time" received the highest mean score among the purposes in the learning area. On the other hand "foster their students' critical thinking skills" was

perceived as being the least important, but still had a mean of 3.51; this means that cycle two teachers used the student's portfolio to develop critical thinking skills but it was less important to them than the other purposes. At the same time it was still seen as a purpose that teachers aimed to achieve from implementing the portfolio. Teachers used the student's portfolio mainly for assessment purposes. This finding aligned with Al-Kharusi et al. (2014) who stated that one of the teachers' main purposes for implementing the assessment tools was for assessing students' learning. Similarly, Arter and Spandel (1992) found that teachers' primary purpose of using the student's portfolio was assessment.

The aim for using the student's portfolio is that teachers would get feedback to improve and modify their teaching strategies to suit students' needs aligned with the aims of the continuous assessment introduced by the Ministry of Education. Teachers are directed to use different assessment tools such as the student's portfolio to gather the data needed that would enable them to reflect on their teaching strategies. Consequently that would lead them to enhance their students' learning (Ministry of Education, 2013b). Moreover, this finding was consistent with the findings of Arter and Spandel (1992) who stated that teachers utilized the student's portfolio to guide them in making the right decisions regarding their teaching methodologies.

The purpose of developing critical thinking skills was the least important purpose that teachers considered when they implemented the student's portfolio. This finding showed one of the reasons for not achieving this aim as reported in *The Drive for Quality* document published by the Ministry of Education and the World Bank in 2012. Even though that purpose got a high mean score, it was at the end of a list of sixteen purposes that teachers aimed to achieve. This result might be attributed to teachers' lack of awareness that the student's portfolio might help them in developing students' critical thinking skills. They might not be aware of how the portfolio could be used to achieve this aim.

All in all, teachers used the student's portfolio for assessment, teaching and learning purposes. This aligned with the aims of the continuous assessment which focused on using different assessment tools such as the student's portfolio to link between teaching, learning and assessment (Al-Kharusi et al., 2014).

Students' purposes for implementing the student's portfolio

Students' responses are presented in Table 2. The mean scores were categorized for interpreting the results as follows:

Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
4.5-5	3.5-4.4	2.5-3.4	1.5-2.4	1-1.4

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviation of the Students' Purposes for Implementing the Student's portfolio

Statements	Mean	SD
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Students used the student's portfolio to:		
1. improve the interaction between them and their teacher.	4.16	.90
2. increase their motivation to learn English.	4.14	.99
3. help them see their development over time.	4.09	1.03
4. help them assess their learning regularly.	4.07	.99
5. help them find out their strengths and weaknesses in learning.	4.06	1.06
6. give them the chance to reflect on their experience in learning a foreign language.	3.99	.99
7. show their efforts in learning English outside the classroom.	3.97	1.14
8. help them become independent learners.	3.83	1.03
9. help foster their critical thinking skills.	3.69	1.16
10. allow them to choose how to plan their learning according to their learning style.	3.65	1.02
Overall	3.96	.63

The results in Table 2 report students' purposes for implementing the student's portfolio. The results indicate that the students generally used the portfolio for all the purposes mentioned at a high level since the mean scores ranged between 3.65 and 4.16 (overall mean, 3.96). When considering each item, it was found that the highest mean score was "improve the interaction between them and their teacher," (M=4.16), followed by "increase their motivation to learn English", (M=4.14).

Item no. 8 which is to help students become independent learners (Mean=3.83), item no. 9 which is related to helping students foster their critical thinking skills (M=3.69) and item no. 10 which is to allow students to choose how to plan their learning according to their learning style (M=3.65) were the items that had the lowest means respectively.

The most important purpose that students aimed to achieve from implementing the student's portfolio was to improve the interaction between them and their teachers. This finding aligned with the findings of Caner (2010) who found that the students in his study viewed working on the portfolio activities as an opportunity to cooperate with their teachers. Similarly, Zhang (2009) stated that his students reported that they used the student's portfolio as a tool to enhance the interaction with their teachers. Similarly, all the students in Javanmard and Farahani's study (2012) reported that their new experience with compiling portfolios strengthened their relationship with their students.

Students were not fully aware of the importance of using the student's portfolio as a tool to develop learner autonomy and critical thinking skills; therefore, they considered these purposes as the least important purposes. That could be due to lack of training and preparation as it could see in the following Tables. According to Husseinali (2012), teachers had introduced learner autonomy to students and trained them well to enhance it before they started compiling their portfolios.

Teachers' roles in implementing the student's portfolio:

In order to investigate the current roles that teachers play in preparing students to implement the student's portfolio and in assessing the student's portfolio, descriptive analysis of the data collected was carried out and presented in Tables 3 and 4. A 5-point scale was used to determine the degree of frequency of the roles listed in this section. A role was considered to be of very high frequency if it ranged between 4.5 and 5, high if it

ranged between 3.5 and 4.4, moderate frequency if it ranged between 2.5 and 3.4, and low frequency if it ranged between 1.5 and 2.4, and very low frequency if it ranged between 1 and 1.4.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of the Dimensions of the Teachers' Roles in Implementing the Student's Portfolio

Dimension	Mean	SD
1. Teachers' roles in preparing students to implement the student's portfolio.	2.13	.67
2. Teachers' roles in assessing the student's portfolio.	2.52	.47
Overall	2.33	.50

Table 3 shows the roles that teachers played in preparing their students to implement the student's portfolio and in assessing the student's portfolio. Generally, teachers rarely did their roles in implementing the student's portfolio (Mean= 2.33). Table 3 reveals that teachers rarely prepared their students to compile their portfolios (mean= 2.13). The Table also shows that teachers assessed their students' portfolios in a moderate level (Mean= 2.52).

For more specific details of the teachers' roles that they played in the process of implementing the student's portfolio, Table 4 shows the means and the standard deviations of the different items that come under this dimension, as well as their roles in assessing the student's portfolio.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Teachers' Roles in Implementing the Student's portfolio

Teachers' Roles	Mean	SD
1-Teachers' roles in preparing students to implement the student's portfolio		
1. Talking about their own language learning experience to introduce the student's portfolio to the students.	2.34	1.01
2. Eliciting students' ideas on how to use the student's portfolio in the classrooms.	2.25	.99
3. Showing students samples of previous portfolios.	2.21	1.06
4. Asking students to refer to a handbook where they can find answers to frequently asked questions regarding the implantation of the student's portfolio.	2.21	.97
5. Allowing students time to discuss with their classmates ways of developing their portfolios.	2.18	.98
6. Asking students to refer to a certain website where they can find answers to frequently asked questions.	2.09	.99
7. Encouraging students to consult a mentor or mentors to guide them in implementing the portfolio.	2.06	.83
8. Displaying posters that present good suggestions for developing portfolios in their classrooms.	1.88	.89
Overall	2.13	.67
II. Teachers' roles in assessing the student's portfolio		
1. Evaluating and grading each product in the student's portfolio separately.	4.11	.85
2. Giving students oral feedback about their portfolios.	3.79	1.09
3. Evaluating and grading the student's portfolio as a whole.	3.29	1.25

4. Asking parents to participate in evaluating their children's portfolios.	2.13	1.05
5. Encouraging students to do peer review to evaluate their portfolios.	1.95	.97
6. Asking school administrators to participate in evaluating the student's portfolio.	1.83	.94
7. Giving students written feedback about their portfolios.	1.57	.71
8. Using an assessment checklist to evaluate the student's portfolio.	1.49	.77
Overall	2.52	.47

Table 4 is divided into two sections to deal with teachers' roles in terms of preparing and assessing the student's portfolio. The results presented in the first part of Table 4 revealed that teachers rarely prepared their students to implement the student's portfolio (overall mean, 2.13). The roles that teachers played in preparing students to implement the portfolios were all within a low frequency, with means that ranged between 1.88 and 2.34. According to these results, the teachers' role which was to talk about their learning experience to introduce the portfolio to their students was considered as the most frequent role that teachers played to prepare students for implementing the portfolio. The least frequent roles were to ask students to refer to a certain website where they could find answers to frequently asked questions (mean, 2.09) , to encourage students to consult a mentor or mentors to guide them in implementing the portfolio (mean, 2.06) and to display posters that present good suggestions for developing portfolios (mean, 1.88).

To investigate teachers' roles in assessing the student's portfolio, the second part of Table 4 presents the frequency of the teachers' roles. Generally, teachers moderately played the roles listed in assessing the students' portfolios (overall mean, 2.52). The results showed that the teachers' role that got the highest mean score was to evaluate and grade each product in the student's portfolio separately (mean, 4.11) followed by giving students oral feedback about their portfolios (mean, 3.79). Those two roles were considered as the most frequent roles that teachers played in assessing the students' portfolios. The moderate frequent role that teachers followed in assessing their portfolios was to evaluate and grade them as a whole (mean, 3.29). The remaining assessment roles were considered to be in a low frequent level. The least frequent one was to use an assessment checklist to evaluate the student's portfolio (mean, 1.49).

The results indicated that teachers rarely prepared their students to implement the portfolio. Therefore students might not have received the sufficient preparation and training to compile their portfolios in the right way. Teachers have to take on more roles in preparing students to implement the portfolio. According to Mok (2012), Yang (2003) and Burksaitiene (2011), preparing students to implement a portfolio is an essential step for successful and effective implementation.

One of the possible reasons for not preparing students to implement the portfolio might be teachers' lack of knowledge about how the portfolio has to be compiled. Al-Kharusi et al. (2014) reported that teachers demonstrated a low level in their knowledge in the assessment area. Teachers might not have received sufficient training that enabled them and gave them ideas in how to prepare their students to compile their portfolios. Time constraints and work load were other factors that might have hindered them from preparing their students to implement the portfolio (Al-Ruqeishi, 2006).

The two most frequent roles that teachers played to prepare their students to compile their portfolios were to talk with their students about their own learning experience and to discuss oral ways of compiling the portfolio. They did those two roles in a low frequency level. This finding could be explained by referring to the teachers' responses in the open ended question that was related to teachers' roles in preparing students to implement the portfolio. Fifty four teachers reported that in the first lesson of each academic school year, they discussed their rules and the course requirements with their students and one of the requirements was the student's portfolio.

Even though the teachers' book recommends that teachers show students samples of previous portfolios, the results showed that teachers rarely did that. That might be due to the fact that teachers might not have read the introduction of the teachers' book. From my experience, teachers complained that the introduction was too long and they did not have time at school to read it. Time constraint again might have prevented teachers from developing themselves in how to help their students compile the portfolios effectively and prevent them from preparing their students for better implementation. According to Al-Kharusi et al. (2014) being overwhelmed by other administrative duties might not give teachers the needed time to utilize the assessment tools in the right way.

Teachers evaluated and graded each activity and product in the student's portfolio. This finding could be explained by referring to one of the main teachers' purposes of implementing the student's portfolio which was to help them assess their students on a regular basis as it was seen in Table 1. In addition, some teachers used the student's portfolio as an evidence of students' achievement for administrators and committees that visited schools. One of the main points that the committees considered when checking the student's portfolio was to see that students' work and activities were checked and assessed by their teachers. Therefore, teachers were aware of this point and they graded all the students' work.

Using an assessment checklist to evaluate the student's portfolio received the lowest mean score. This finding might be due to the fact that the Ministry of Education did not provide teachers with a ready-made checklist to use. By analyzing both the curriculum and assessment documents, there was not any sample of a checklist that teachers could adopt. In addition, teachers were not guided in how to design their own checklists to evaluate the student's portfolio.

Even though teachers were recommended in both curriculum and assessment documents to encourage parents and peers to assess student's portfolio, teachers rarely asked parents and peers to comment on the portfolios. According to Berne (2009) and Yang (2003), teachers have to arrange and establish this kind of assessment to allow students to receive useful feedback to improve their portfolios. Time constraint, work load and lack of training were again factors that might have led to such a finding (Al-Kharusi et al., 2014; Al-Ruqeishi, 2006).

Even though giving written feedback was recommended for better learning and achievement (Sadler, 2010), it was found that teachers rarely gave their students written feedback (Mean, 1.57). According to Lo (2010) assessing the student's portfolio and

giving each student written feedback on their portfolios was considered as a great challenge due to the limited time. This might explain one of the reasons for not focusing on giving students written feedback. Moreover, Zhang (2009) reported that teachers in his study found difficulties in assessing and commenting on each student's portfolios and that they considered it as an exhausting work due to the extra time and effort. Consequently, teachers in the current study might have considered written feedback as a work that required extra time and effort so that prevented them from implementing this role in the desirable way.

Students' roles in implementing the student's portfolio

The third part of the students' questionnaire was aimed at finding out students' roles in implementing the portfolios. The roles were divided into three areas which were students' roles in making decisions, in preparing themselves to implement the portfolios and in compiling their portfolios. A 5-point scale was used to determine the degree of frequency of the roles listed in this section. A role was considered to be a very high frequency if it ranged between 4.5 and 5, a high frequency if it ranged between 3.5 and 4.4, a moderate frequency if it ranged between 2.5 and 3.4, a low frequency if it ranged between 1.5 and 2.4, and a very low frequency if it ranged between 1 and 1.4.

Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations of the three dimensions of the students' roles that they played in the process of implementing the student's portfolio.

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of the Dimensions of the Students' Roles in Implementing the Student's Portfolio

Dimension	Mean	SD
1. Students' roles in making decisions regarding their portfolios.	2.09	.86
2. Students' roles in preparing themselves to implement the student's portfolio	2.27	.50
3. Students' roles in compiling their portfolios.	2.71	.43
Overall	2.36	.43

Generally, grade ten students rarely played the listed roles in implementing their portfolios (Mean, 2.36). It appears clearly from Table 5 that the students rarely participated in making decisions regarding their portfolios (Mean, 2.09). Similarly, they rarely played their roles in preparing themselves to implement the student's portfolio (Mean, 2.27). Students did the required roles in compiling their portfolios in a moderate level (Mean, 2.71).

For more specific details of each dimension of the students' roles, Table 6 presents the means and standard deviations of all the roles that students played in the process of implementing the student's portfolio.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of the Students' Roles in Implementing the Student's portfolio

Statements	Mean	SD
I. Students' roles in making decisions regarding their portfolios		
1. participating in making decisions in what to include in my portfolio.	2.14	1.18
2. participating in working on portfolio activities and projects.	2.11	1.15
3. participating in stating the purpose of the portfolio.	2.06	1.09

4. participating in stating criteria for assessing my portfolio.	2.03	1.04
Overall	2.09	.86
II. Students' roles in preparing themselves to implement the portfolio		
1. discussing and sharing ideas with my classmates.	2.59	.89
2. Looking at previous students' portfolios.	2.55	.79
3. Referring to a handout or a handbook on how to compile my portfolio.	2.09	.83
4. Referring to a website.	1.86	.79
Overall	2.27	.50
III. Students' roles in compiling their portfolios		
1. keeping all materials, tasks and activities in my portfolio.	4.41	.82
2. caring about the appearance of my portfolio	3.82	1.00
3. keeping some of my work from previous years.	2.97	1.09
4. keeping certificates from previous years	2.82	1.09
5. writing learning goals to be achieved from using the portfolio.	2.09	.89
6. writing about my experience in learning English	2.08	.85
7. adding appropriate explanations to the selected samples or records.	1.77	.93
8. doing the self-assessment	1.72	.85
Overall	2.71	.43

The results presented in the first part of Table 6 reveal that the students' roles concerning making decisions in the process of implementing the portfolio were all performed in a low frequency manner, with means that ranged between 2.03 and 2.14 (overall mean, 2.09). According to these results, the most frequent role that students played within this dimension was to make decisions regarding the content of their portfolios. The least frequent role was to participate in stating criteria for assessing their portfolios (mean, 2.03).

To investigate students' roles to prepare themselves to implement the student's portfolio, the second part of Table 6 presents the frequency of the students' roles in preparing themselves to implement the portfolio with an overall mean of 2.27 which was considered as a low frequent level. The results show that the highest mean score was to discuss and share ideas with their classmates (mean, 2.59) which was considered as a moderate frequent role. The remaining roles were considered to be at a low frequent level. The least frequent one was to refer to a website (mean, 1.86).

In addition, the third part of Table 6 presents students' roles in compiling their portfolios. Generally, students moderately did their roles in compiling their portfolios (overall mean, 2.71). The most frequent students' role was to keep all materials, tasks and activities in their portfolios (Mean, 4.41), followed by caring about the appearance of their portfolios (Mean, 3.82). Students did the previous two roles at a high frequency level. To keep some of their own work from previous years (Mean, 2.97) and to keep previous years' certificates (Mean, 2.82) were the roles that the students did moderately when compiling their portfolios. The remaining roles were performed less frequently. The least frequent role was to do the self-assessment (Mean, 1.72).

Regarding the roles of making decisions, students seemed to have limited opportunities to make their own selection of items and artefacts to be included in their portfolios. That was apparent from analyzing some of the students' portfolios. The portfolios that were selected from the same class contained almost the same activities which indicated that

students were instructed to keep certain activities in their portfolios by their teachers. Students rarely had a reason or wrote an explanation for the selected samples as was seen in Table 6. They were passively following their teachers' instructions in what to include in their portfolios. According to Singh and Samad (2013), students have to participate in selecting and reflecting on the items of their portfolios purposefully. By doing that, students would take responsibility of their learning by paying attention to their weaknesses and strengths.

One of the main aims of the educational system in the Sultanate of Oman is to have active learners who are involved in making decisions of their learning to develop a sense of responsibility (Ministry of Education, 2010a). However, if learners receive everything regarding their portfolios from their teachers, that would contradict with the learner-centred methodology which the Ministry of Education aims to achieve. Therefore, there is a need to allow students the chance to participate actively in making decisions regarding their portfolios.

As can be seen in Table 6, students rarely did the self-assessment when they compiled their portfolios, a finding that aligned with Erdogan and Yurdabakan's findings (2011). Erdogan and Yurdabakan (211) found out that their students had difficulties doing the self-assessment in compiling their portfolios. The researchers referred their findings to the new experience of doing the self-assessment. According to O'Malley and Pierce (1996), self-assessment was considered as an essential component of the portfolio. They believed that in order to develop students' language skills and to enhance their autonomy, students have to do the self-assessment. Otherwise, those outcomes would not be achieved in a desirable way.

Keeping work and certificates from previous school years were two roles that students performed at a moderately frequent level. According to Moss et al. (1992), in order to use the portfolio as a comprehensive picture of students' learning, the portfolio has to include a variety of students' work over time. Activities, tasks and certificates from previous years could be included as an evidence of the students' progress and development.

CONCLUSIONS

The student's portfolio is an effective tool that can be used to achieve different assessment, teaching and learning purposes. Results revealed that both teachers and students used the student's portfolio for a variety of purposes. The findings of this research study covered the current teachers' and students' practices of the student's portfolio. It was found that teachers rarely prepared their students to implement the portfolio. Similarly, students rarely prepared themselves to implement the portfolio. Teachers' most frequent role in assessing their student's portfolio was to grade all the activities. There were other best practices, which were discussed in the literature review and the Ministry of Education document; however, encouraging parents and peers to participate in assessing the portfolios and giving students written feedback on their portfolios were rarely followed by the teachers. Students rarely participated in making decisions regarding their portfolios and the most frequent role in compiling their

portfolios was to keep all tasks, activities and materials in their portfolios. It was found that there were no gender differences between male and female teachers regarding their roles in assessing and preparing students to implement the portfolios. On the other hand, there were some gender differences among students in their roles in implementing their portfolios.

In conclusion, the failure of the student's portfolio to use its full potential in the Omani context may be explained by the incomplete implementation. The frequency level of both teachers' and students' roles in implementing the student's portfolio do not meet the best practices suggested in literature review or by MOE.

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