



## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND PERFORMANCE ON PORTFOLIOS

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### Abstract

Formally and informally, for individuals and for groups of students, teachers continually assess their students' progress and achievements. Teachers report accomplishment to the students, their parents and the school system by means of grades and comments written on assignments, conversations, classroom discussions, parent-teacher conferences and casual chats, and report cards. Testing is no longer considered as an adequate measure of students' learning nor a sufficient reason for students to invest effort in schoolwork. New methods of assessment that provide multidimensional and longitudinal portraits of students' strengths and weaknesses are required to provide developmental benchmarks of learning. One such alternative method capable of bridging quantitative and qualitative data is portfolio assessment as one of its benefits is the promotion of learner reflection. Accordingly, this study aims to inspect what teachers think about their students' attitudes and performance on portfolios and portfolio tasks.

**Key Words:** Alternative assessment, portfolio assessment, performance assessment.

### INTRODUCTION

Globalization, rapid technological developments and the rate of growth in knowledge call for better curriculum, assessment, and pedagogical decisions and practices. Lawton (1998) has indicated that a curriculum for the twenty-first century requires a shift from content and objectives to skills and processes. Other features of this curriculum include a focus on the creation of new knowledge, an emphasis on the interdependence of knowledge areas and on the relevance of school knowledge to everyday problems.

Evaluation in such programmes that are designed for learners include assessments that attend to individual needs as well as their accomplishments. Standardized tests, which are often norm-referenced, multiple-choice and machine-scorable instruments, cannot on their own tell teachers much about how learners are acquiring academic contents. These instruments may generate faulty results (Barootchi & Keshavarz, 2002).

Testing is no longer an adequate measure of students' learning nor a sufficient reason for students to invest effort in schoolwork. New methods of assessment that provide multidimensional and longitudinal portraits of students' strengths and weaknesses are required to provide developmental benchmarks of learning. These new forms of assessment provide longitudinal evidence and personal stories of individuals' learning and development, not just snapshots of test scores, grades and comments on report cards. (Paris & Ayres, 1994).

The multiple measures that teachers take across time such as tests and assignments, observations of progress as students work individually and collectively at different tasks and in different settings, provide detailed evidence for judgments of achievement. This strong evidentiary base can yield more valid inferences of student achievement than standardized tests yield. Understanding terms, principles, and options is important for teachers and for the measurement professionals whose work should support them. Teachers are increasingly expected to develop new assessment methods and to select assessment materials skillfully. (Mabry, 1999)

Assessment has an impact on everything and everyone in the educational system. A change can have an outsized impact because of the interconnectedness of educational entities and ideas (Mabry, 1999). In an educational context, assessment has become the engine and the odometer of reform. Increasingly, assessment



is being used not only to monitor student achievement but also to evaluate the competence of educators and the quality of educational systems. Education is dynamic and ongoing, so our thinking about measurement should not be static. Assessment paradigms and practices should not be rigid.

Whether the implications are good or bad, assessment remains an integral part of both the teacher and student experience in the classroom. Good assessment and evaluation practices can help to expose effective from ineffective teaching and sufficient from insufficient curricula. (Van Duinen, 2005) Assessment has been largely influenced by various paradigms and school of thoughts. It has also been shaped by sociopolitical pressures in the school culture. This is especially true in the elementary and secondary school environments where interacting events are intricately related and often unpredictable (Suleiman and Moore, 1998). The search for alternatives to traditional types of assessment that primarily rely on pencil and paper tests has generated several innovative approaches to assessment having names like performance assessment, alternative assessment and authentic assessment (Hart, 1994). Similarly, as noted by Garcia and Pearson (1994), a wide variety of terms, including performance assessment, alternative assessment, authentic assessment, portfolio assessment, and dynamic assessment, have been used by educators to label assessment methods not associated with formal standardised testing.

Moreover, alternative assessment can be referred to as a non-traditional assessment type with forms of performance observation and portfolios that outline a detailed picture of student performance in line with curricular goals (Ericse, 2009). Proponents of alternative assessment argue that it integrates classroom instruction and evaluation procedures (Shepard et al., 1996), provides evaluation techniques that are relevant to students (Travis, 1996), encourages students to take responsibility for their own work (Maeroff, 1991) and results in an ongoing, holistic picture of student performance (Shepard et al., 1996).

The perspectives of teacher knowledge and its effects on the instructional practices are imperative if changes in assessment programs are to reflect changes in instruction as well (Allington, 1994). Thus, for educators, the question is more of whether alternative assessment programs can be successfully implemented within current systems of curricular and instructional goals. (Culbertson and Yan, 2003) On the other side, the use of portfolios for learning and assessment is becoming internationally popular (Klenowski, 2003). A portfolio of work can be used for development and assessment of subject knowledge, acquisition of teaching skills and reflective practice, professional and vocational preparation and employment.

In recent years there has been a virtual explosion of interest in portfolios. Boyle (1994) sums up the appeal of this assessment approach: The portfolio, as an element of authentic assessment, has captured the interest of many instructors who want a more comprehensive way to assess their students' knowledge and skills, to have students actively participate in the evaluation process, and to simultaneously develop students' skills of reflective thinking. These latter features make portfolios an attractive alternative to summative testing.

Portfolios are rich, contextual, highly personalized documentaries of one's learning journey. They contain purposefully organized documentation that clearly demonstrates specific knowledge, skills, dispositions and accomplishments achieved over time. Portfolios represent connections made between actions and beliefs, thinking and doing, and evidence and criteria. They are a medium for reflection through which the builder constructs meaning, makes the learning process transparent and learning visible, crystallizes insights, and anticipates future direction (Jones and Shelton, 2006). In this respect, this study aims to provide information about the attitudes and performances of the students on portfolio tasks.

After designing a new program for primary schools in 2005, the Constructivist Approach was taken into consideration. Among many of them, a prominent change in the new curricula was the approach taken towards the assessment of learning. More emphasis was given to process evaluation rather than product evaluation. Also, instead of using just tests and exams, such tools as portfolios, projects, group works were used in assessment of student's learning. Accordingly, portfolios represent both an expression of Constructivist learning and a vehicle for Constructivist practice. The process learners experience in developing portfolios, and the products that result, allow them to show their cognitive, social and affective skills. In a way, portfolios are mirrors of their builders.

## METHOD

The study was conducted with the primary school teachers in Sereflikoçhisar. Sereflikoçhisar is a rural district of Ankara, which is 148 kilometers away. This district was selected using convenience sampling. The reason for utilizing convenience sampling was that the researcher working in this district. Şereflikoçhisar is one of the obligatory service districts of Ankara for teachers. The circulation of teachers is very high, since most teachers work for short periods and try to move to other cities. Of the 24 primary schools of the district, 23 of them are public, one of them is private. There are 245 teachers working in these schools according to the data provided by the National Education Directorate of Şereflikoçhisar.

The instrument was adapted from a questionnaire which was developed by Brian M. Stecher, Acting Director of RAND Corporation in the USA and conducted to evaluate the Vermont portfolio assessment program in 1992 and 1993. Upon the permission of Brian Stecher, the questionnaire was examined and revised. The data, which were collected through the questionnaires, were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. The Likert scale type questions were analyzed by using frequencies and percentages using SPSS

## FINDINGS

The research question was “What do teachers think about students' attitudes and performance on portfolios and portfolio tasks?” In order to answer this research question; firstly, questions about students' portfolio performances were asked and then a final question which compares student performance and teacher expectations was implemented. In order to depict the reactions of students to the portfolios and portfolio tasks, firstly the students were divided into three groups as low achieving, average achieving and high achieving, following this, participants were questioned accordingly. Table 1 shows the reactions of low achieving students.

Table 1: Reactions of low achieving students to the portfolios and portfolio tasks

	<b>Almost None (f - %)</b>	<b>A Few (f - %)</b>	<b>About One Half (f - %)</b>	<b>Most (f - %)</b>	<b>Almost All (f - %)</b>	<b>Total (f - %)</b>
<b>Enjoy doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities</b>	<b>10 6.5</b>	<b>32 20.8</b>	<b>39 25.3</b>	<b>65 42.2</b>	<b>8 5.2</b>	<b>154 100</b>
<b>Like the portfolios better than regular assignments</b>	<b>12 7.8</b>	<b>40 26</b>	<b>41 26.6</b>	<b>53 34.4</b>	<b>8 5.2</b>	<b>154 100</b>
<b>Learn more owing to the portfolios</b>	<b>7 4.5</b>	<b>59 38.3</b>	<b>42 27.3</b>	<b>41 26.6</b>	<b>5 3.2</b>	<b>154 100</b>
<b>Find portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments</b>	<b>15 9.7</b>	<b>58 37.7</b>	<b>49 31.8</b>	<b>28 18.2</b>	<b>4 2.6</b>	<b>154 100</b>
<b>Portfolio tasks do not reflect his/her ability</b>	<b>8 11.9</b>	<b>54 35.8</b>	<b>49 32.5</b>	<b>30 19.9</b>	<b>- -</b>	<b>151 100</b>

The participants were requested to give their opinions about students' portfolio related performances with the frame of five sentences. Participants believed that most of the low achieving students enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities with 42.2 % (f = 65). Next, it was slightly agreed that most students liked the portfolios better than regular assignments with the percentage of 34.4 (f = 53). However, 38.3 % (f = 59) accepted that a few of the low achieving students learned more owing to the portfolios. Similarly, 37.7 % (f = 58) affirmed that a few of the low achieving students found portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments. Finally, 35.8 % (f = 54) thought portfolio tasks did not reflect their abilities. Next, reactions of the average achieving students were explained as in Table 2.

Table 2: Reactions of average achieving students to the portfolios and portfolio tasks

	Almost None (f - %)	A Few (f - %)	About One Half (f - %)	Most (f - %)	Almost All (f - %)	Total (f - %)
<b>Enjoy doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities</b>	-	15	51	77	7	150
	-	10	34	51.3	4.7	100
<b>Like the portfolios better than regular assignments</b>	-	22	45	73	9	149
	-	14.8	30.2	49	6	100
<b>Learn more owing to the portfolios</b>	2	19	55	65	9	150
	1.3	12.7	36.7	43.3	6	100
<b>Find portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments</b>	5	19	58	62	5	149
	3.4	12.8	38.9	41.6	3.4	100
<b>Portfolio tasks do not reflect his/her ability</b>	6	51	55	31	4	147
	4.1	34.7	37.4	21.1	2.7	100

Regarding average achieving students, more than half of the participants believed that most of the average achieving students enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities with 51.3 % (f = 77). Nearly half of the participants affirmed that most students liked the portfolios better than regular assignments with the percentage of 49 (f = 73). Following this, 43.3 % (f = 65) of participants stated that most average achieving students learned more owing to the portfolios. Furthermore, 41.1 % (f = 62) thought most of the average achieving students found portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments. Lastly, 37.4 % (f = 55) declared portfolio tasks did not reflect nearly half of the students' abilities. Finally, reactions of high achieving students were presented as in Table 3.

Table 3: Reactions of high achieving students to the portfolios and portfolio tasks

	Almost None (f - %)	A Few (f - %)	About One Half (f - %)	Most (f - %)	Almost All (f - %)	Total (f - %)
<b>Enjoy doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities</b>	4	7	29	72	38	150
	2.7	4.7	19.3	48	25.3	100
<b>Like the portfolios better than regular assignments</b>	4	10	28	75	33	150
	2.7	6.7	18.7	50	22	100
<b>Learn more owing to the portfolios</b>	3	13	32	66	35	149
	2	8.7	21.5	44.3	23.5	100
<b>Find portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments</b>	4	15	39	63	28	149
	2.7	10.1	26.2	42.3	18.8	100
<b>Portfolio tasks do not reflect his/her ability</b>	11	54	39	31	12	147
	7.5	36.7	26.5	21.1	8.2	100

Dealing with the case of high achieving students, 48 % (f = 72) thought most of the high achieving students enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities. In addition, 50 % (f = 75) assured most high achieving students liked the portfolios better than regular assignments. In accordance with the first two items, 44.3 % (f = 66) confirmed most high achieving students learned more owing to the portfolios. Additionally, 42.3 % (f = 63) believed most of the high achieving students found portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments. In

conclusion, 36.7 % (f = 54) pointed out portfolio tasks did not reflect a few of the high achieving students' ability.

For the last question, participants were inquired to share their opinions about the contribution of portfolios to the learning processes of students which was illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4: The contribution of portfolios to the learning process of students

	f	%
<b>much less</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Less</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>22.7</b>
<b>neither less nor more</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>42.2</b>
<b>More</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>27.3</b>
<b>much more</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>100</b>

While comparing their expectations with the actual contribution of portfolios to the learning process of students, 27.9 % (f = 43) of the participants thought that this contribution was less than they expected; on the contrary, 29.9 % (f = 46) concluded the improvement caused by portfolio process was more than they imagined. However, 42.2 % (f = 65) believed nothing much changed.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The questionnaire was about the opinions about students' attitudes and performance on portfolios and portfolio tasks. Teachers explained students are generally better on portfolio tasks and discussed reactions of students to the portfolios and portfolio tasks. They described that low achieving students enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities, liked the portfolios better than regular assignments; however, they do not learn more owing to the portfolios, they do not find portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments and teachers believed portfolio tasks did not reflect their ability. According to the teachers, average achieving students also enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities, liked the portfolios better than regular assignments, learned more owing to the portfolios and found portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments; however, they believed portfolio tasks did not reflect their ability. For the next part, teachers revealed high achieving students enjoyed doing portfolio tasks more than regular activities, liked the portfolios better than regular assignments, learned more owing to the portfolios and found portfolio tasks easier than traditional assignments; and they stated portfolio tasks did not reflect their ability. Finally, the teachers concluded the portfolios did not contribute much to the learning process of the students.

As for the implications of portfolios on students, all students no matter they are low, average or high achieving like portfolio activities more than traditional assignments. This shows that portfolios appeal to students. While average and high achievers learn more due to the portfolios, low achievers do not learn more. More important than that, teachers believe portfolios do not contribute much to the learning process of students. Therefore, teachers need to reorganize portfolio activities according to the needs of all students, especially low achievers.

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