

ABSTRACT

An Investigation into the Use of Portfolio Assessment to Complement Traditional Assessment

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This study has been undertaken to investigate the use of portfolio assessment in complementing traditional assessment to provide greater authenticity in the assessment of literacy. It argues that traditional assessment with its grades and ranking cannot by itself provide a dynamic picture of students' academic development, and so an alternative assessment which requires students to show what they know, and not only what they can recall, is called for. Through the actual implementation of a portfolio assessment programme, the researcher gathers evidence about how students approach, process and complete real-life tasks.

The research adopts a mixed research approach, utilising a predominantly qualitative paradigm, collecting qualitative data and performing qualitative analysis as well as converting qualitative data to quantitative data. Data was collected and analysed by use of observations, desk review of documents, questionnaires, reflective analyses and assessment of students' task and activities. Data interpretation included looking for patterns related to the sources and methods.

The main results of the research make clear the influence that portfolio assessment has on establishing a comprehensive and realistic picture of students' performance, as well as the stage that students are at with understanding themselves as learners while thinking about their work. In addition to finding that it holds great promise, the thesis also concludes that portfolio assessment requires a high level of planning, dedication and commitment on the part of stakeholders, and professional development for teachers and assessors in particular. The challenge is to modify the existing methods of assessment, and minimise potential conflicts.

Keywords: Assessment, traditional assessment; alternative assessment; portfolio assessment; literacy; mixed research; authentic assessment; multiple intelligences; learner independence