World Conference on Educational Sciences 2009

Examination of the merits and pitfalls of the internship portfolio

Sıtkıye Kuter*

Department of Educational Sciences, Eastern Mediterranean University, Gazimağusa, Mersin on Turkey, Northern Cyprus.

Abstract

This study discusses the findings of a case study examining the effectiveness of the ELT internship portfolio with regard to the dimensions of its overall direction and contents, assessment procedures, and interns' growth. The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures to investigate the issue from the standpoints of trainees, supervisors, and mentors. The analysis of multiple data yielded invaluable findings regarding the constructs of the internship portfolio displaying effectiveness and requiring further investigation and revision.
© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.

1. Introduction

Teaching portfolios, one of the widely practiced approaches to developmental teacher assessment system, are employed to cultivate interns' thinking and self-assessment processes for growth. They are an effective means of awakening trainees' teaching decisions by involving them in profound examinations from multiple lenses and connecting thinking and performance (Darling-Hammond and Synder, 2000).

The rational and procedures for using portfolios can vary depending on the ultimate aim of the program, yet keeping portfolios can be scrutinized from three dimensions: portfolios as teacher assessment tools, a means of reflection-on-practice, and developmental assessment tools. As an assessment tool, portfolios can be a means of summative (as an exit requirement of a course) and formative evaluation (as a developmental process of trainees' strengths and weaknesses in teaching performance) (Hammadou, 1996) or a mixture of both. They can provide a comprehensive look into how the various aspects of a teacher's practice - planning, instruction, assessment, curriculum design, and communication with peers - come together (Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2000:537). They are regarded as powerful tools as they reflect both the products of trainees under supervision and the process of how their teaching philosophies progress in a course of action (Loughran and Corrigan, 1995). Next, reflection is considered as the core of portfolio building aiming to involve practitioners in cyclical, flexible, focused, and holistic

---

* Sıtkıye Kuter. Tel.: +90 392 6301418; fax: +90 392 630 4038.
  E-mail address: sitkiye.kuter@emu.edu.tr

thinking processes to promote their noticing of instructional events (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998). Finally, what is crucial is not to deem portfolios as records of achievement or proof of success of certain outcomes but as a means of monitoring the growth of trainees' knowledge, skills and attitudes (Woodward, 2000).

Engaging trainees in self-regulatory learning through portfolios might bring certain benefits and limits. The benefits can be listed as enhancing trainees' reflection on their teaching performance as a means to further develop themselves in instructional issues (Bastidas, 1996), showing their growth and learning over time (Wade and Yarbrough, 1996), and serving the purpose of building a better world through constructive and critical reflections on past events (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998). In contrast, procrastination, superficial and unreflective entries, waning enthusiasm, and inability to reflect are some of the common problems encountered when keeping portfolios (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998). Another limitation concerns the point that different people might have different expectations regarding what constitutes a good or competent performance in teaching (Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2000). Thus, perceptions of various assessors' are reflected differently on the overall assessment of trainees.

This research aims to examine the supervisors', mentors' and trainees' stances as to the success of the ELT internship portfolio from the dimensions of its overall route and contents, assessment, and trainees' growth.

2. Method

2.1 Research design

Case study was adopted as a research strategy to gather rich data for the comprehensive examination of the portfolio. A case study is a detailed examination of one setting or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or a particular event (Yin, 1994). The study derived quantitative-qualitative data by employing the strategy of methodological and data triangulation (Cohen et al., 2000) via questionnaires, interviews, and documents to examine the portfolio as an assessment and developmental tool. Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods …. in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks (Patton, 2002:247-248).

2.2 Context

The study was conducted in Internship, a fourth-year second semester course offered to teacher candidates of English in the department of English language teaching at the Eastern Mediterranean University, Northern Cyprus. The course, within a joint theory-practice framework, aims to improve trainees' teaching performance and develop their awareness about effective teaching and learning by involving them in reflection-on-practice and reflection-on-improvement processes (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998).

To complete the course successfully, trainees were required to keep a portfolio, designed to promote their reflection and development through ten teaching sessions and self-reflection reports and a final report. The teaching appraisal forms (TAFs) provided the means for appraising trainees' performances from multiple dimensions - personality, teacher talk, warm up and motivation, presentation, planning, aids, correction, giving feedback, stages of the lesson, and achievement of aims - with the sections added for the evaluator's comments. Next, with the self-reflection tasks, trainees were given the opportunity to reflect on their teaching experiences with a critical eye. The aim was to involve trainees in self-evaluation processes through which they will draw inferences for the reconstruction of their knowledge. Finally, the final report required them to reflect retrospectively on all instructional, curricular and self-developmental processes throughout the program.

In this study, twenty-two trainees were paired and placed at the West School (WS - fictitiously named) for six weeks to conduct ten hours of teaching practices, two hours per week, under the supervision of a mentor. The first two hours of the first week were scheduled for informal observations so that trainees could have preliminary information about the classes they would be teaching. The rest of the ten hours, four of which were formally assessed, were allotted for classroom teaching. While two hours of teaching sessions were assessed by the mentor, one session was appraised by a trainer at the WS and the supervisor, respectively.

2.3 Data collection and analysis

Two sets of questionnaires, having parallel items, were prepared, piloted and administered to sixteen trainees (out of 22), all supervisors (3), and sixteen mentors (out of 22) involved in the program. The items on the questionnaires were formed as a 5-point Likert-type scale for the participants to indicate the strength of their agreement and disagreement by ticking boxes ranging from SA (strongly agree) to SD (strongly disagree). Each

item also included a comment section. The questionnaires administered to the supervisors and the trainees included twenty-one items related to the guidelines and contents of the portfolio, TAF, assessment criteria, self-reflection tasks, final report, and the impact of teachers' guidance on trainees' growth. The one administered to the mentors at the WS involved twelve items related to the reflection and assessment aspects since the mentors were expected to supervise the trainees during two-way meetings and appraise their performances on the basis of TAF. Further, the trainees' reflective reports were gathered and interviews were conducted with the subjects to provide a context in which they express their own reality, perceptions and understanding of the events about the portfolio (Patton, 1987).

SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to analyze the data collected via questionnaires, which were, first, processed separately in terms of frequencies and, then, categorized according to the items - general guidelines, appraisal forms, assessment criteria, reflective tasks, final report, and the impact of portfolio on trainees' development. Later, the researcher used Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric tests to determine relationships and significance of differences among the perceptions of independent populations on the contents and processes of the portfolio. Mann-Whitney U test is used to analyze the significant differences in the medians on a test variable between two groups, while Kruskal-Wallis test is conducted to examine differences in medians among groups (Green et al., 2000). These tests would inform the researcher about the items showing discrepancies between participants' views regarding the aspects examined. Finally, the qualitative data were processed considering the participants' perceptions on the strengths and weaknesses of the aforesaid aspects of the portfolio. To ensure credibility/internal validity of the research, mixed-method evaluation (Greene, 1997) - strategy of methods and data triangulation - was adopted since it helps to spot both consistencies and inconsistencies in findings and, hence, contribute to the verification and validation of qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002).

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Clarity of the goal, contents and processes

The findings gathered from multiple-perspective data demonstrate how three groups viewed the effectiveness of the portfolio. The quantitative results show that the portfolio has certain problems regarding the statement of the trainees' responsibilities and the ways how they are supposed to complete it. Both trainees (X =2,6) and supervisors (X =2,0) were inclined to disagree with item 2 - 'The portfolio stated trainees' responsibilities explicitly' - and item 3, - The portfolio explicitly stated how trainees are supposed to complete it', as the means of the trainees' and supervisors' responses to item 3 is (X =2,5) and (X =2,0), respectively. Concerning the explicitness of how to write self-reflection tasks, Kruskal-Wallis test results displayed a significant difference (P=,002). Trainees thought positively about the issue (X =4,5), while supervisors were inclined to be neutral (X =3,0) and mentors tended to agree (X =3,7). The disparity in the views might be due to the point that the trainees had already done similar tasks in 'School Experience II', so they were familiar with the questions of the reflective tasks. Two supervisors deemed the questions in these tasks as too general and vague in providing sufficient guidance to trainees to write reflective reports. Further, half of the mentors and two supervisors suggested giving preliminary information to mentors and trainees about how trainees are expected to do reflective tasks.

On the other hand, Mann-Whitney U test results (see Table 1) revealed significant difference (P=,023) among the perceptions of supervisors (X =3,0), and trainees (X =4,7) as regards item 1. Supervisors reported to be neutral

Table 1. Significant differences for the items re the route of the portfolio from the trainees' and supervisors' views

ITEMS	N	Mean Rank	U	P
1) The content of the portfolio is designed in accordance with the course objectives.	16 3	11,25 3,33	4,000	,023
4) The portfolio states how student teachers' overall performance will be assessed throughout the program.	16 3	11,13 4,00	6,000	,047

about whether the contents of the portfolio was designed in accordance with the course objectives, while trainees tended to strongly agree with this item. Two supervisors stated that there were gaps and missing points that should be added as to the clarity and completeness of the portfolio. The point stressed by the subjects from both groups was that the portfolio stated what the students were supposed to write, but not HOW. One trainee especially reported,

'Guideline was not enough. We know how to write lesson plans but may be we'd have more information. The whole process of portfolio is vital. There is no information about the whole process of portfolio.' The results also showed that there is a significant difference (P=,047) among the views of the trainees (X=4,3) and supervisors (X=2,3) in item 4. One supervisor said, '(Trainees) need guidance in compiling the portfolio. At the beginning everything is in the air. Whatever explanations you make, it's not contextualized because they aren't aware what we expect from them.' The need for revising certain parts of the TAF was stressed by another supervisor. The origin of this problem might be that trainees are not appraised on the basis of certain criteria. The literature on portfolio assessment shows that grading, format, organization, and students' roles are some problems emerging during portfolio keeping (Woodward 2000). To ensure trainees growth, the risks - ambiguity about the purpose, incomplete information about the content and organizational aspects of portfolio development - need to be considered (Wray, 2007).

3.2 Assessment dimension of the portfolio

The triangulated data drew attention to TAF and its assessment criteria. Firstly, though both trainees and mentors agreed (X=4,0) concerning the effective formation of the TAF (item 6 in Table 2), the supervisors' neutral

Table 2. The medians of the items related to the assessment from the supervisors', trainees' and mentors' stances

ITEMS	N	$\overline{X}$	S
6) The formal teaching appraisal forms are designed effectively to show student teachers' strengths and weaknesses in various categories related to their overall teaching.	16	4,0	1,0626
	3	3,0	1,0000
	16	4,0	1,0328
9) It is appropriate to evaluate student teachers' teaching performance on the basis of the numerical scale, (10, 9,…), in the formal appraisal forms.	16	4,1	1,4549
	3	2,6	,0000
	16	3,5	,6191

report ($\overline{X}$=3,0) about this item led us to think twice before proceeding. The qualitative data uncovered this problem since two supervisors and a great majority of mentors and one third of trainees stated that there are repetitions, overlaps and unclear categories in TAF. The categories related to achievement of aims, planning, feedback-correction, planning stage, and presentation-warm up were reported vague for assessment. One trainee found the form incomplete with regard to issue about classroom management. Further, the results of three population groups yielded slightly varied answers about the numerical assessment of trainees as shown in item 9 in Table 2. It is the

Table 3. Significant difference for the item related to the assessment criteria from all perspectives

ITEM	N	Mean Rank	H	P
10) There is an explicit standard assessment criterion used for the overall evaluation of student teachers' teaching performance.	16	22,03	12,600	,017
	3	5,00		
	16	16,41		

supervisors who tended to be neutral about assessing the trainees numerically. One supervisor particularly emphasized on the difficulty of appraising trainees objectively with the number ranging from ten to zero. The significant difference emerged in item 10 via Kruskal-Wallis test results (see Table 3) can be an answer to the origin of the problem. The qualitative data also supported this in that a great majority of the subjects in all groups stressed on the subjectivity of appraising trainees' performance on the basis of the criteria given on the TAF. The need of standardized criteria for assessing trainees' performances was proposed by all population groups. Confusion as regards assessment criteria is one of the reasons of the risks involved during portfolio compilation (Wray, 2007).

The portfolio, when linked to the clinical supervision process, advances teacher development (Zepeda, 2002: 91). The portfolio as a developmental assessment tool was evaluated from the aspects of teaching appraisal forms, reflective tasks and the feedback trainees received on TAFs. Firstly, as shown in item 5 in Table 4, the number of the formal teaching appraisals tasks was deemed to be unreasonable for trainees' development in

Table 4. The medians of the items about the trainees' growth from the supervisors', trainees' and mentors' views

ITEMS	N	$\overline{X}$	S
5) The number of the formal teaching practice hours is reasonable for student teachers' development in teaching.	16 3 16	3,3 2,3 3,0	1,4009 1,5275 1,3663
7) Supervisor's/Mentor's feedback in teacher appraisal forms help student teachers see their strengths and weaknesses in their teaching experiences clearly.	16 3 16	3,8 4,0 4,2	1,3769 ,0000 ,7746
8) Comments sections in the formal teaching appraisal forms are designed effectively to enable me to provide accurate feedback on student teachers' performance.	16 3 16	4,0 3,0 4,0	,9287 1,0000 ,7303
17) The final report helps student teachers see their overall development throughout the program and set further goals to improve themselves from personal and professional aspects.	16 3	4,3 4,0	,8062 1,0000

teaching. While trainees tended to be neutral ($\overline{X}$=3,3), supervisors disagreed ($\overline{X}$=2,3), and mentors were neutral ($\overline{X}$=3,0). The triangulated qualitative data also reflected the discontent of the trainees and supervisors as regards the number of teaching appraisal processes. Particularly, the decrease of the number of teaching experiences to six during placement negatively affected the trainees, some of whom suggested an increase both in the number of practical experiences and in the number of supervisors' evaluations of trainees. Besides, though the feedback given on TAFs was considered effective in raising trainees' awareness as regards their strengths and weaknesses related to their teaching experiences (see item 7), the qualitative data exhibited that trainees were in favour of getting more feedback from mentors (Hamlin, 1997) and preferred written feedback along with oral feedback. Further, the comment sections in TAF (item 8) and the final report (item 17) were deemed effective since the former provided good guidance in appraising trainees' strengths, weaknesses and making suggestions for their improvement and the latter facilitated trainees' setting further goals for their improvement. Conversely, the qualitative data displayed some participants' concerns about the insufficiency of the space provided for feedback and the extent and depth of the feedback provided by the mentors. Besides, nearly half of the mentors claimed that the difference between the sections of 'weaknesses' and 'points to consider' is not transparent.

The effectiveness of the portfolio about the reflective tasks (see Table 5) yielded positive results from three stances. All population groups agreed that the reflective questions were clear enough to help the trainees reflect on

Table 5. The medians of the items related to the trainees' growth through reflective tasks from all perspectives

ITEMS	N	$\overline{X}$	S
12) The reflective questions are clear enough to help student teachers reflect on their teaching practices thoroughly.	16 3 16	4,2 4,0 3,6	,5774 ,0000 ,8062
13) Reflective tasks help student teachers become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses of their overall teaching performance.	16 3 16	4,5 4,3 3,9	,6325 ,5774 ,7719
14) Reflective tasks guide student teachers effectively to develop teaching strategies in order to improve the weaknesses of their teaching performance.	16 3 16	4,3 4,3 3,8	,6021 ,5774 ,7188
15) Reflective tasks guide student teachers effectively to check whether they improved themselves in the areas that they had problems.	16 3 16	4,3 4,0 4,0	,6191 1,0000 ,7303

their teaching practices thoroughly and that reflective tasks promoted the trainees' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses about their overall instructional performances. Moreover, all participants agreed that reflective tasks guided the trainees effectively in not only developing teaching strategies to improve the weaknesses of their teaching performance but also checking whether they improved themselves in the areas that they had problems. In contrast, the qualitative data suggest that though a good number of the trainees found the self-reflective questions clear, they claimed that those questions did not provide enough guidance, so they requested the number of questions

to be increased. While most of the mentors claimed that the trainees lacked the ability to reflect on their teaching experiences orally, two supervisors complained that the trainees could not write reflective reports, so some student teachers were reported as copying the mentors' suggestions as their reflection in their reflective report. This stresses the value of improving trainees' reflection skills so as to be critically reflective teachers. Reflective writing is a learned process requiring students to build certain skills to be able to successfully reflect (Francis, 1995).

As regards the impact of the teachers' guidance on trainees' growth, Kruskal-Wallis test results displayed a significant difference (P=,010) - see Table 6 - among the perceptions of the three population groups - student teachers agreed (X =4,3), supervisors strongly agreed (X = 4,6), and mentors agreed (X =3,6) with the item 20.

Table 6. Significant difference with regard to the supervisory support from three population groups

ITEM	N	Mean Rank	H	P
20) While keeping portfolio, the supervisor and/or mentor provide(s) feedback, support, and assistance when necessary so that student teachers can reflect on their teaching experiences.	16 3 16	21,97 25,00 12,72	9,214	,010

The disparity might stem from the fact that the mentors were only informed about the number of direct experiences not about the portfolio. They were only requested to supervise the trainees placed in their classes. One trainee said, 'to inform her (mentor) for example my mentor didn't know about the content of the course that we have got. She didn't help me exactly.' This brings attention the value of 'collaborative portfolio development process' realized with the participation of students in the teaching learning community to provide them collegial support (Wray, 2007). In this respect, trainees need to be provided support and guidance to accomplish the thinking skills and autonomy in learning (Klenowski, 1998) by those who formally and informally supervise trainees (Zepeda, 2002).

4. Conclusion and Implications

Examination of the portfolio from three angles points to certain critical aspects as regards the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolio. Firstly, student self-evaluation and reflection is an important integral process of portfolio use that can promote metacognitive thinking for students (Klenowski, 1998). The portfolio was considered effective as to the reflective tasks and final report since they became the means to guide trainees in improving themselves. That the TAF provided space for the supervisors' and mentors' feedback was also regarded effective as it facilitated trainees' growth. For professional growth, portfolio should foster reflective dialogue, examine professional development activities, provide a focus for classroom observations (Zepeda, 2002). However, the aspects - lack of ability of the trainees in reflecting on their teaching experiences and the insufficiency of oral and written feedback during post-meetings - were considered inhibiting effective compilation of the portfolio. Teacher education should challenge and develop student teachers' cognitive interests and enable them to be conscious agents in their pedagogy (Moran and Dallat, 1995: 25). The success of reflective practice rests on two critical elements – the skills of the reflective practitioner and the quality of support provided by fellow professionals (Moran and Dallat, 1995). The portfolio process requires students to think about their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in thoughtful ways and how those characteristics can be framed within the context of portfolio (Wray, 2007:1145). Without a clearer sense of the specific quality of reflection associated with portfolio use, the quality of the teaching assessment will be greatly limited (Zeichner and Wray, 2001:620). Hence, 'the orientation to and monitoring of portfolio development' (Winsor et al., 1999:28) is vital for the effective execution of portfolios.

Next, understanding the concept of portfolio, its intended purpose(s), and audience(s), the process of evidence selection, reflection, and organizational strategies are critical in building up portfolios (Wray, 2007). The portfolio was considered unclear with respect to its target and direction about how to build it. The limitations of the TAF regarding unclear and overlapping sections and lack of a standard assessment criterion were deemed as requiring critical attention. As to Darling-Hammond and Synder (2000), the criterion acknowledges that the bases for making inferences from an assessment are as important to its validity as is the assessment task itself (p. 528).

The findings of this study hold significant implications to improve the success of the portfolio and suggest that certain parts of the portfolio should be reviewed and revised to foster its effectiveness and, therefore, trainees'

growth. To do this, further qualitative research via narrative inquiry needs to be conducted to examine trainees' reflective texts and portfolio building processes to locate the origins of the problems as the findings revealed.

References

Bastidas, J. A. (1996). The teaching portfolio: A tool to become a reflective teacher. *English Teaching Forum, 34* (3-4), 24-28.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Snyder, J. (2000). Authentic assessment of teaching in context. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 16* (5-6), 523-545.

Francis, D. (1995). The reflective journal: A window to preservice teachers' practical knowledge. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11* (3), 229-241.

Ghaye, A. & Ghaye, K. (1998). *Teaching and learning through critical reflective practice.* London: David Fulton Publishers.

Green, S. B., Salkind, N. J. & Akey, T. M. (2000). *Using SPSS for windows: Analyzing and understanding data.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Greene, J. C. (1997). Theory and practice: Advancing mixed method evaluation. *The Evaluation Exchange: Emerging Strategies in Evaluating Child and Family Services, 3*(1), 2-3.

Hamlin, K. (1997). Partnerships that support the professional growth of supervising teachers. *Teacher Education Journal.* 24 (1), 77-88.

Hammadou, J. (1996). Portfolio design and the decision making process in teacher education. In Z. Moore (Ed*.), Foreign Language Teacher Education: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 123-149), USA: University Press of America.

Klenowski, V. (1998). The use of portfolios for assessment in teacher education: a perspective from Hong Kong. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education,* 18(2), 74-86.

Loughran, J. & Corrigan, D. (1995). Teaching portfolios: A strategy for developing learning and teaching in preservice education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 11* (6), 565-577.

Moran, A. & Dallat, J. (1995). Promoting reflective practice in initial teacher training. *International Journal of Educational Management, 9*(5), 20-26.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* USA: Sage Publication Inc.

Patton, M. Q. (1987). *How to use qualitative methods in evaluation.* USA: Sage Publications.

Wade, R. C. & Yarbrough, D. B. (1996). Portfolios: A tool for reflective thinking in teacher education? *Teaching and Teacher Education, 12* (1), 63-79.

Winsor, P. J. T., Butt, R. L. and Reeves, H. (1999). Portraying professional development in preservice teacher education: can portfolios do the job? *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice*, 5(1), 9-31.

Woodward, H. (2000). Portfolios: Narratives for learning. *Journal of In-Service Education, 26* (2), 329-348.

Wray, S. (2007). Teaching portfolios, community, and pre-service teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 23*(7), 1139-1152.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods.* Thousand Oaks CA, Sage Publications.

Zeichner, K. & Wray, S. (2001). The teaching portfolio in US teacher education programs: What we know and what we need to know. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17* (5), 613-621.

Zepeda, S. J. (2002). Linking portfolio development to clinical supervision: A case study. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 18*(1), 83-102.