Chapter 7

EPortfolio Use in Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a review of eportfolio use in Africa through analysis of some statistics and some case examples. The author proposes a centralized eportfolio center supported by the Ministry of Education in each country.

INTRODUCTION

Portfolios have been used for many years by artists, painters, and architects to present their best achievements. Electronic portfolios have become more popular in the wider community; however, as learning tools, knowledge retention mechanisms, and forms of assessment (Lougheed, 2005). Although ePortfolios are defined differently, the definition by Scott Wilson is useful: “An ePortfolio is a repository of information about a particular learner provided by the learner and by other people and organizations, including products in a range of media that the learner has created or helped to create alongside formal documents from authoritative sources, such as transcripts of assessed achievement, which the learner has chosen to retain” (Zubizarreta, 2009).

Researchers propose different structures for the ePortfolio. A commonly used structure is proposed by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Wade, 2005). This structure includes three sub-ePortfolios:

1. The learning sub-portfolio (also known as a “process” or “working” portfolio) shows the student’s progress in knowledge acquisition. It may contain works in progress, may track student learning over time, and may be temporary because students move on to either an assessment or presentation portfolio. The creation of this sub-ePortfolio is a reflective exercise designed to promote learning. This type of portfolio is primarily a
device for teacher and learner to assess skills, reflect upon one’s learning, and establish new learning plans (Barrett, 2005).

2. The assessment sub-portfolio (also known as an “accountability” or evaluation portfolio) supports evaluation by teachers. It provides evidence of learning and of measurable outcomes useful for faculty evaluators. The student writes a brief designed to prove that learning has taken place.

3. The presentation sub-portfolio (also known as a “showcase” or “marketing” portfolio) exhibits the student’s best work. It is generally used to illustrate the level of accomplishment that the student has attained. Students often use this portfolio during college applications or for professional employment purposes (Barrett, 2005).

ANALYSIS OF PORTFOLIO USAGE

Problematic Results

To examine the extent of portfolio use in Africa, we consulted google.com with four results that are less illuminating than we had hoped. First, the same experiment using google.com was conducted on August 24, 2008 and November 11, 2009. Although this kind of experiment is not a rigorous one, it points to the range of significance of portfolios in Africa in relation to other places. In Table A1 (Appendix A1), we calculated the ratio of the ePortfolio’s occurrence in relation to the population numbers on each continent similarly for both years. The word ePortfolio has an importance of 0,00007 in Africa but is three times more important in Europe (0,0002), four times as important in America, and nearly thirty times as important in Australia (0,002). These figures may indicate a gap between Africa and Europe or America in the information and communication technology (ICT) needed for ePortfolios. These ratios do indicate that the importance of the ePortfolio is much higher in the developed countries than in Africa where it is still nearly absent.

Second, to obtain an accurate estimation of the technology gap we made the same comparison with the pioneers of ePortfolio use, the United States and Canada (Cloutier et al., 2006). The results shown in Table B1 (Appendix B) clearly indicate that while the population in Canada is 0,04 lower than in Africa (Population, 2008), the use of ePortfolios is thirty times more important there (0.02 and 0.00007).

Third, as the word ePortfolio is tightly related to the Internet, we looked for the same ratios but with the word portfolio, which is more independent from the Internet, because a portfolio can be in paper form. Table C1 (Appendix C) can indicate portfolio use in online and paper forms.

Although the results in Table C1 may lead to the conclusion that the concept of portfolio is more important in Africa (0,02) than in Europe (0,005), a confounding factor was the use of portfolio in contexts other than education. The word portfolio is used in the tourist field and in the financial one. Nearly every African country has portfolios that represent many tourist focuses such as the sea, the Sahara, animals, hotels, and traditional villages. Also, many African countries that benefit from international funds from institutions such as the African Bank and the United Nations have Internet pages dealing with the distribution of these funds. Because of this confounding factor, the same task was repeated by using the two words portfolio and education. Although the results shown in Table D1 (Appendix D) are more logical, many pages contained only the word education, so, again, we do not have clear evidence of the range of portfolio use in education in Africa.

Four, in a final attempt, we used the words ePortfolio, portfolio, and portfolio education to try to calculate the ratio of the word ePortfolio over the population in some African countries. In Table E1 (Appendix E), the results are inconclusive, because so many sites carried names of an
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