Chapter 15
Challenges and Opportunities in Developing Language E-Portfolios

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ABSTRACT

Eportfolios have been widely used for different purposes in education for years. However, specific issues regarding the use of language eportfolios are unaddressed. This chapter first discusses the definitions, purposes, and advantages of eportfolios. It then describes the challenges of implementing eportfolios in higher education in Taiwan. Finally, it presents the design of an online language portfolio developed to provide possible alternatives or “opportunities” for the use of language eportfolios in educational settings. The design has three primary goals: reducing students’ cognitive load, raising students’ reflection on language learning, and fostering social interaction through peer assessment. In order to reduce students’ cognitive load, auto-generated keywords alleviate students’ workload. Auto-generated concept maps allow students to construct summaries while reading texts. The portfolio also provides students with opportunities to monitor and reflect on their learning process by playing crossword puzzles and writing feedback regarding assigned learning tasks. Students are allowed to post their texts anonymously in order to freely and honestly interact and construct meaningful learning with peers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, e-portfolios have been widely used for different purposes in education, especially in monitoring students’ learning processes (Kankaanranta, Barrett, & Hartnell-Young, 2001; Niguidula, 1993), assessing their learning progress, and strengthening their employability after college graduation (Smith & Tillema,
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Specific issues regarding the use of language e-portfolios, however, are unaddressed: these include whether students could upload and organize their documents in the language e-portfolio without incentives, whether students could consistently reflect on their performances to maximize their learning outcomes, and whether the language e-portfolio will increase students’ cognitive load. Because of the unaddressed issues, language educators and system developers have troubles designing language e-portfolios that can reach their maximum beneficial effects on students’ learning. The definitions, purposes, and advantages of e-portfolios described here provide readers with background for the further discussion of challenges in developing online language portfolios. The language e-portfolio developed in this study in bridging the gap between the existing portfolios and students’ needs addresses reducing students’ cognitive load, raising students’ reflection on language learning, and facilitating peer assessment through social interaction.

1.1 Definitions, Purposes, and Advantages of E-Portfolios

With the development of advanced technology and the Internet, the use of e-portfolios has extended to realms of teaching, learning, and assessment. Chang (2009) defines an e-portfolio as “the storage of authentic and multiple evidences, representing the demonstration and reflection of personal learning process and the result within a period of time” (p. 391). That is, an e-portfolio collects students’ learning processes to illustrate their learning journey over time and to document their achievements (Bulte, 2006). E-portfolios also allow students to upload numerous multimedia file types such as texts, photographs, observations, and evaluations from instructors, and records of students’ reflective thinking processes (Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005; Bulte, 2006). E-portfolios are a useful learning tool for students to manage their learning experiences in virtual contexts.

Students’ active participation and reflection on their own learning through e-portfolios (Barrett and Knezek, 2003) enhance their learning and prepare them to become autonomous learners. To enhance students’ learning, some e-portfolios consist of three distinct but related learning modules: showcase, assessment, and process. The showcase module in the e-portfolio indicates that the system records students’ accomplishments during their life-long learning experience (Lankes, 1998) and prepares students for the competitive job market. Students’ presentation of creations, assignments, and certificates can positively influence potential employers. The assessment module refers to students’ collection, organization, and evaluation of their relevant learning products to demonstrate the achievements of their learning goals (Biggs, 1996). This module enables teachers and students to monitor and assess the learning process. The process module presents students’ learning experiences, including through log files and statistics that illustrate the strategies students employ to accomplish their goals (Meyer, Abram, Wade, Aslan, & Deault, 2010).

2. E-PORTFOLIOS IN TAIWAN

E-portfolio has been rapidly expanding in Taiwanese universities since its introduction in 2007 (Lai, 2009). More than 80% of universities in Taiwan have implemented e-portfolios on campus, because e-portfolios record students’ learning processes and add extra value for students to seek jobs by showcasing their progress.

2.1 Promotion of E-Portfolios by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan

As e-portfolios can demonstrate students’ learning achievements and illuminate their competences, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan has promoted e-portfolios in higher education.