
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Moroccan EFL Teachers' Perceptions towards the Portfolio Task Assignment as a Pedagogical Tool for Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of this study is to examine teachers' perceptions of using the portfolio task assignment as an instructional tool to develop students' critical thinking skills. It seeks to explore the factors shaping these attitudes, particularly teachers' training and classroom experience with portfolio-based practices. In addition, the study evaluates the effectiveness of portfolio tasks in enhancing the critical-thinking abilities of Moroccan middle-school learners. By analysing students' engagement with portfolio activities, it aims to determine the extent to which such tasks support their capacity to think critically, solve problems, and interpret information. This study is significant because it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the use of portfolio-based assessment to foster critical thinking among early adolescent learners. Given that these students are at the initial stages of English language learning, the study also considers the added challenges they face in developing language proficiency and higher-order thinking skills simultaneously. Ultimately, the study seeks to deepen understanding of the pedagogical value of portfolio task assignments and their role in promoting critical thinking in middle school contexts, while also offering insights that may help improve teaching practices and educational outcomes in this area.

KEYWORDS

Portfolio-based assessment; critical thinking; teachers' perceptions; English language learning (EFL); Moroccan middle school learners; Higher-order thinking skills

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1. Introduction

The language-teaching field is undergoing a significant transformation, characterised by a shift in expectations and the emergence of essential skills that help students succeed in both educational settings and life outside the classroom. This dynamism underscores the critical need to equip students with robust critical-thinking skills, which are vital for navigating the challenges of the future job market (Rothenstein et al., 2007; Walker, 2000).

In light of these developments, relying solely on traditional teaching methods, which often prioritise rote memorisation and passive learning, is no longer sufficient. The transition toward innovative and creative teaching approaches is becoming increasingly vital, particularly in secondary education, where students prepare for higher academic engagement and future careers. However, despite this necessity, many Moroccan middle school English teachers frequently overlook the importance of integrating these modern strategies into their curricula, particularly when fostering critical thinking and implementing student portfolios as practical assessment tools, which remain innovative and authentic approaches (Yang, 2003). In this context, critical thinking skills are among the most essential competencies for 21st-century learners in Moroccan middle schools. These skills empower students to analyse information, evaluate different viewpoints, and develop unique insights, enabling them to engage with the world in a more nuanced and informed way. Moreover, using the portfolio task assignment as a pedagogical tool provides an opportunity for students to develop their critical-thinking abilities in a structured way. Portfolios make students reflect on their learning over time, showcase their development, and encourage self-assessment (Yang, 2003). By integrating this practice into the educational

framework, teachers can create an environment conducive to critical and reflective thinking, motivating students to take ownership of their learning journeys (Hinchcliff, 2009).

Thus, embracing student portfolios as a fundamental element of teaching and assessment represents a progressive step forward. This method transforms students from passive to active participants who engage thoughtfully with the learning process. More importantly, it prepares them for the complexities of contemporary life and the job market (Bahous, 2008).

The primary objective of the present investigation is to examine teachers' attitudes toward using the portfolio task assignment as an educational tool to enhance students' critical thinking skills. This investigation will assess various factors influencing teachers' perceptions, including their training and experience associated with using portfolios in classrooms. This study is particularly compelling for its contribution to the broader body of knowledge on implementing portfolio task assignments tailored to foster critical thinking abilities among early adolescent learners. Most of these students are still at the beginning level of learning English, which adds an essential dimension to the study, considering their unique challenges in acquiring both language skills and critical thinking competencies. Ultimately, this study aspires to enhance understanding of the portfolio task assignment and its crucial role in developing critical thinking skills in middle school students. By examining teachers' attitudes and outcomes, this study seeks to provide valuable knowledge that may help improve educational practices in critical thinking education in its specific context.

2. The portfolio task:

The portfolio task is widely recognised as a pedagogical tool and an organised collection of students' work in various formats. It is deliberately used in classrooms to monitor student progress, evaluate performance, and showcase their efforts and achievements across one or multiple subjects. As such, portfolios serve as displays of students' skills and creations, reflecting their ideas, attitudes, and work. They also represent students' decisions regarding their learning journey (Paulson & Meyer, 1991). The literature on portfolios offers several helpful definitions of this educational tool, which is often used for learning and assessment purposes. Merriam-Webster (2020) describes a portfolio as "a selection of a student's work (such as papers and tests) compiled over some time and used for assessing performance or progress." Other definitions in research appear similar. Hancock (1994) states that portfolio assessment involves "an ongoing process involving the student and the teacher in selecting samples of student work for inclusion in a collection, the main purpose of which is to show the student's progress" (p. 4). Based on this, a portfolio is essentially a collection of students' work and related documents that represents a selection of their performance. In simple terms, it can be seen as a folder containing selected pieces of a student's work and their evaluations of the student's strengths and weaknesses. It may also include works in progress, such as drafts that illustrate the essay-writing process. Accordingly, Paulson and Meyer (1991) define a portfolio as a purposeful compilation of work that displays the student's efforts, growth, and achievements in learning. When considering these definitions, a portfolio can be viewed as an evolving collection of student work, in which each addition serves a clear purpose. Students choose each piece carefully. The main goal of a portfolio is to enable students to showcase their learning and progress to others. Additionally, creating portfolios turns students into active learners and participants in their own assessment process. The use of the portfolio is believed to facilitate a deeper understanding of students' needs, aid in identifying learning deficiencies, and inform the planning of targeted instructional activities to enhance the overall learning process. Additionally, several studies indicate that many educators have integrated portfolios as a complementary approach to both teaching and assessment. Notably, a study by Beyhan et al. (2012) examined pre-service teachers' awareness of portfolios, considering factors such as gender, university affiliation, and area of study. The results indicated that pre-service teachers' awareness was at a moderate level, suggesting opportunities for further development in this area (Beyhan et al., 2012).

3. The portfolio task and critical thinking:

The portfolio is commonly considered both a process and a product that can provide learners with a personal space to document their experiences and articulate their learning. By building portfolios, students will have the opportunity to experience the five elements outlined above: coherence, integration, applicability, competence, and communication. In this way, portfolios used in foreign language learning contexts can be seen as students' productions, giving them greater freedom to assert themselves and express themselves more openly, without the pressure of the classroom atmosphere and teachers' control over the teaching process. In addition, portfolios can assess students' learning and mastery of various skills.

Seeing portfolios this way aligns with ideas that go beyond considering students' portfolios. Instead, they consider it not only a product but also a process. In other words, the portfolio, as argued by the two researchers, can be described as a process which allows learners to move beyond what they learn and start thinking about how they learn through reflecting critically on what takes place in class. With this in mind, the use of portfolios as teaching and assessment tools has been linked to various benefits for teachers and learners, including:

- Promoting self-regulation, reflection and critical thinking.
- Enabling students and teachers to share responsibility for setting learning goals and evaluating the process towards achieving them.
- Facilitating cooperative learning activities.
- Allowing the measurement of students' progress on different levels.
- Giving the students the chance to have extensive input for their learning.

When comparing critical thinking and portfolio, it is worth noting that listing similarities or differences between them is not feasible. In contrast, the two concepts are strongly interconnected: using portfolios as a teaching tool has proved very helpful in developing learners' critical thinking skills, as the task of portfolio building encompasses various processes, namely planning, compiling, sharing, discussing, reflecting, and giving and receiving feedback. Put differently, the portfolio, as a product or process, can be regarded as the result of critical-thinking processes. Being able to discuss and reflect on learning experiences or outcomes can be a challenging task. Instead, it should involve elements of thinking deeply and critically. Accordingly, the creation of portfolios is an opportunity that enables learners to become critical thinkers, as they bear responsibility for assessing and producing their own collections.

In light of the abovementioned ideas, the portfolio can be considered a tool for enhancing higher-level thinking skills since it can be used to record intellectual growth, which subsequently leads to reflective and critical thinking process (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). Linking portfolios with critical thinking, it was found that portfolios provide teachers with concrete evidence of critical thinking. In other words, the writing of portfolios can increase evidence of critical thinking outcomes. In the same sense, portfolios are found to be helpful for teachers in assessing students' higher-order thinking skills as well as assisting students in training their higher-level thinking skills, such as critical and analytical thinking (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Furthermore, the portfolio helps students develop their critical thinking skills by allowing students and teachers to collaborate and solve a range of problems. Tezci and Dikici (2006) argue that portfolios can also foster students' sense of learning responsibility. It is clear from the aforementioned claims that portfolios can help students become more autonomous, reflective, and independent learners who think critically (Hancock, 2004). Besides, portfolios are considered tools for involving learners, improving teaching and learning, and reflecting on assessment reform. They also demonstrate authentic learning and a common vision of goals (Mokhtaria, 2015).

Taking into consideration the aforementioned, it is imperative to acknowledge that the portfolio serves as a valuable instrument in honing and nurturing students' critical thinking aptitude within the specific academic framework and broader scope of life. In this particular regard, Courtney and Abodeeb (1999) conducted research which led them to find that the process of analysing students' compilations in their portfolios is very indicative of discovering that students' reflections on what and how they study are strong enough to help them develop and foster a sense of critical thinking towards their schooling. Hence, the use of portfolios is very likely to provide learners, who are unquestionably essential contributors to the teaching and learning processes, with the opportunity to project and express their ways of seeing things, including their likes and dislikes along with their views about the effectiveness and compatibility of what they are studying with their learning needs and inclinations. This approach respects the student's role in their learning process and values their perspectives. (Courtney & Abodeeb, 1999)

Given the claim that portfolios help make students critical thinkers, Courtney and Abodeeb (1999) argue that the parents should also be involved, especially in the beginning stages of creating portfolios. In the same regard, encouraging the use of portfolios in class is expected to positively impact learners' ability to make purposeful judgments, make decisions, learn new concepts, and solve problems. This will give students who use portfolios the chance to analyse, interpret, and state their views about the knowledge they receive in class and their surroundings or worldly issues. Making use of portfolios will result in benefiting students significantly in their learning process and enable them to solve problems beyond formal education contexts. (Aguirre, 2004)

In light of the abovementioned views, it is understood that investing in portfolios in class can play a significant role in allowing the chance for learners, because not all students have this skill by nature, to develop the characteristics of critical thinkers, including being inquisitive, well-informed, reasonable, open-minded, flexible and diligent to seek relevant information (Facione, 1998). Additionally, portfolios are expected to assist learners in developing their critical thinking skills, as students are free to express themselves and show creativity, provided that their reflections in their portfolios are concrete demonstrations of their critical thinking (Torres Diaz, 2009).

In a nutshell, implementing the portfolio task assignment is highly recommended as an efficient tool for promoting critical and reflective thinking among learners. Portfolios provide students with a structured way to document their learning experiences over a certain period. Students can create a comprehensive overview of their educational journey by systematically recording their thoughts, assignments, projects, and other relevant activities. Taking this into account, the portfolio task remains an essential resource for nurturing and refining students' critical thinking skills. It provides a structured way for students to reflect on their experiences, to analyse their progress, and to connect theoretical knowledge to real-life situations. By engaging students in this process, they can develop their ability to think critically and make informed decisions in various aspects of their lives. In addition to documentation, portfolios encourage students to assess their progress and reflect on their understanding of key concepts in the subject. This self-assessment process allows learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, set personal goals, and take ownership of their educational experiences (Bahous, 2008). Moreover, using a portfolio fosters a profound evaluation of the quality of their work. It prompts students to think deeply about the connections between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby enhancing their ability to apply what they have learned in real-world contexts. This integration of theory and practice not only solidifies their understanding but also improves their overall learning outcomes, making portfolios an invaluable component of a well-rounded educational approach (Bahous, 2008).

4. Methodology

4.1. Significance of the study

The rising interest in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) can be attributed to several factors, including the effects of globalisation, rapid technological advancements, and the ever-expanding body of human knowledge. As the world becomes more interconnected, the demand for English language proficiency grows, creating opportunities for learners across various countries and industries. In light of this trend, educators and language experts have increasingly focused on the importance of critical thinking skills as an essential element in second language acquisition and instruction. Therefore, there is a significant focus on recognising critical thinking skills as a key area of interest in second language learning and teaching. The development of such skills is vital for students to create practical solutions to the challenges they encounter in their academic, professional, and personal lives, ensuring their success in both educational and societal contexts (Holmes et al, 2015).

These skills enhance a learner's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English and prepare them to navigate complex global challenges and engage in meaningful discussions within diverse cultural contexts. By prioritising critical thinking in EFL programs, educators aim to empower students to become more proficient, reflective, and adaptable communicators in an increasingly competitive world. Critical thinking is an essential 21st-century skill that students must acquire; therefore, schools must integrate it into the curriculum (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The portfolio task assignment can enhance higher-level thinking skills by enabling the development and recording of intellectual growth, fostering a reflective, critical thinking process. In addition, portfolios provide teachers with concrete evidence of critical thinking. In other words, the writing of portfolios can increase evidence of essential thinking outcomes. In the same sense, portfolios are helpful for teachers in assessing students' higher-order thinking skills and assisting students in training their higher-level thinking skills, such as critical and analytical thinking (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Therefore, the need to teach critical thinking skills through the use of student portfolios in middle schools is significant in several ways, given that the student portfolio is valuable because it can considerably contribute to the development of critical thinking skills (Aguirre, 2004; Courtney & Adodeeb, 1999). There is an eminently and significant requirement of implementing the student's portfolio as a teaching tool in Moroccan middle schools to inculcate critical thinking skills in Moroccan adolescent learners of English at an early age because the student's portfolio provides an influential chance and possibility for students to analyse, interpret and state their views about the knowledge they receive in class and their surroundings or worldly issues as asserted by Aguirre (2004) meaning that making use of portfolios will result in benefitting students significantly in their learning process and enable them to solve problems beyond formal educational contexts. On that account, the primary purpose of this study is to provide insights into the significance of implementing the student portfolio as a teaching tool to help foster Moroccan middle school learners' critical thinking skills and to put forward pedagogical recommendations for language teaching and learning communities.

4.2. Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine teachers' attitudes toward using portfolio-based assignments to enhance critical thinking. The central question guiding this study is whether the systematic use of portfolio tasks can act as both a pedagogical and assessment mechanism that significantly influences students' capacity to engage in critical thinking.

4.3. Research questions

This study investigates the effect of the portfolio task assignment on developing Moroccan EFL learners' critical thinking skills. To conduct this investigation effectively, it is imperative to narrow down the research objectives and formulate precise questions that align with the overarching aim of the current study. These methodically developed research questions will enable systematic addressing of the research gap. Accordingly, the research question, which serves as the focal point of the investigation, is postulated:

RQ: What are the attitudes of teachers towards using the portfolio task assignment as a tool to develop critical thinking?

This question addresses teachers' attitudes toward using the portfolio task assignment to develop critical thinking. To gather the necessary data to answer this question, a questionnaire aligned with Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) has been used.

4.4. Research hypothesis

This study aims to investigate Moroccan EFL teachers' perceptions of portfolio task assignments as a pedagogical tool for enhancing critical thinking skills. To thoroughly explore this topic, a research hypothesis has been established as follows:

RH: Teachers' attitudes influence the implementation of the portfolio task assignment in Moroccan middle schools EFL classrooms.

4.5. Research design

Given the quantitative nature of this study, it adopts a primarily quantitative approach, employing the questionnaire as a research instrument.

4.6. The questionnaire

As far as the construction of the questionnaire is concerned, it was based on the Planned Behaviour theory as developed by Ajzen (1991). All questions and entries in the questionnaire are based on Ajzen's components of the Planned Behaviour Theory (1991), specifically teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, and self-efficacy. The Theory of Planned Behaviour serves as a framework for elucidating teachers' attitudes and behaviours regarding the utilisation of student portfolios, examining the perspectives and actions of Moroccan middle school teachers and identifying the fundamental personal and contextual factors that influence their behaviours related to portfolio use. The components of the questionnaire pertain to the three principal constructs of the theory of planned behaviour, as formulated by Ajzen (1991). The constructs encompass teachers' attitudes, subjective norms, and self-efficacy.

The questionnaire used in the present study answers the main research question, which is teachers' attitudes towards the use of the student's portfolio as a tool to enhance critical thinking, and it also demonstrates the three constructs of the theory of planned behaviour, namely teachers' attitudes, subjective norm and self-efficacy. This questionnaire was distributed to middle school teachers in different regions of Morocco and administered online using Google Forms.

According to Blaxter et al. (2001), the questionnaire is considered one of the most commonly used research techniques. Questionnaires, in fact, make it easy for researchers to collect data from a broad population, as they can be distributed to the target community at large. The present study uses the questionnaire to collect quantitative data to discover Moroccan EFL teachers' attitudes towards using the student portfolio.

5. Data analysis and presentation

As mentioned earlier, data were collected using the questionnaire in the present study to answer the main research question: teachers' attitudes towards the use of the student portfolio as a tool to enhance critical thinking. The questionnaire also demonstrates the three constructs of the theory of planned behaviour, namely teachers' attitudes, subjective norm and self-efficacy. This questionnaire was distributed to middle school teachers in different regions of Morocco and administered online using Google Forms.

The first question investigates the feelings of teachers towards the use of the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, as the following chart shows:

Figure 1

Teachers' feelings about using the portfolio task assignment

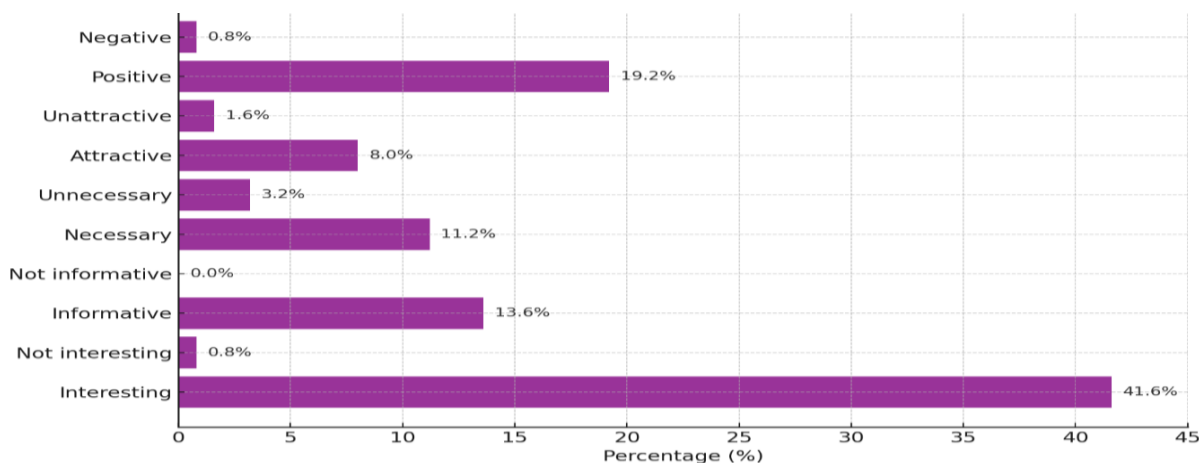


Figure 1 shows that most teachers considered the portfolio task as an interesting educational tool. The percentage of teachers who believed so constitutes 41,6 % of the total respondents. This is followed by the feeling that portfolios are positive, shown by 19,2% of the respondents. Only 0,8 % of teachers show some rejection in the area of the portfolio task.

The second question concerns the extent to which teachers are aware of the importance of using the portfolio. The following figure illustrates teachers' awareness of the importance of using the portfolio:

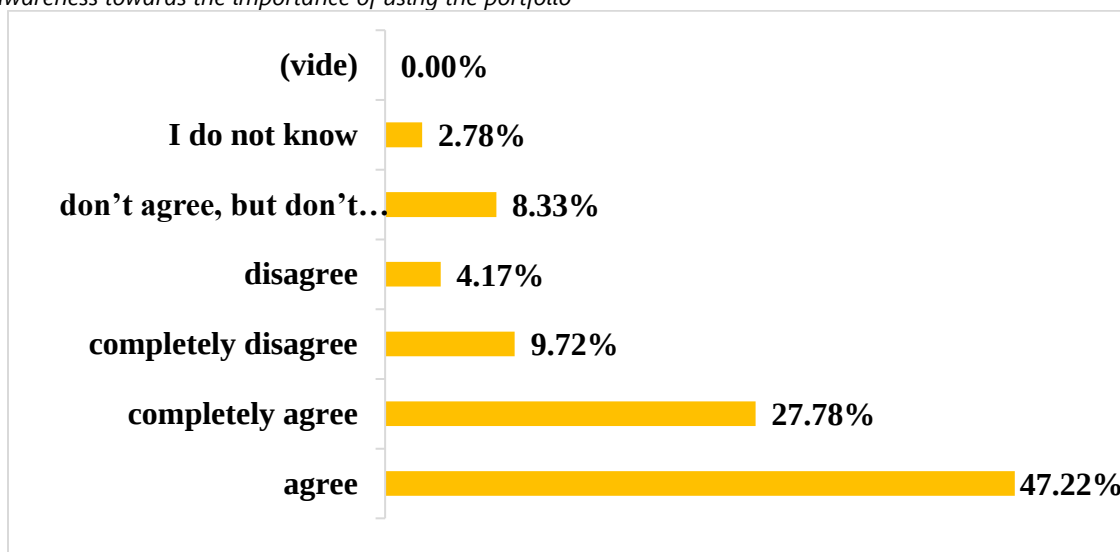
Figure 2*Teachers' awareness towards the importance of using the portfolio*

Figure 2 highlights teachers' overwhelmingly positive perspectives on using portfolios as an effective educational tool to enhance student learning. Most respondents expressed their understanding of portfolios' crucial role in the learning process. They acknowledged that portfolios serve as a method for students to showcase their work and facilitate self-reflection, goal-setting, and personalised learning pathways. This insight underscores the value of incorporating such tools into educators' instructional strategies to foster deeper engagement and understanding among students.

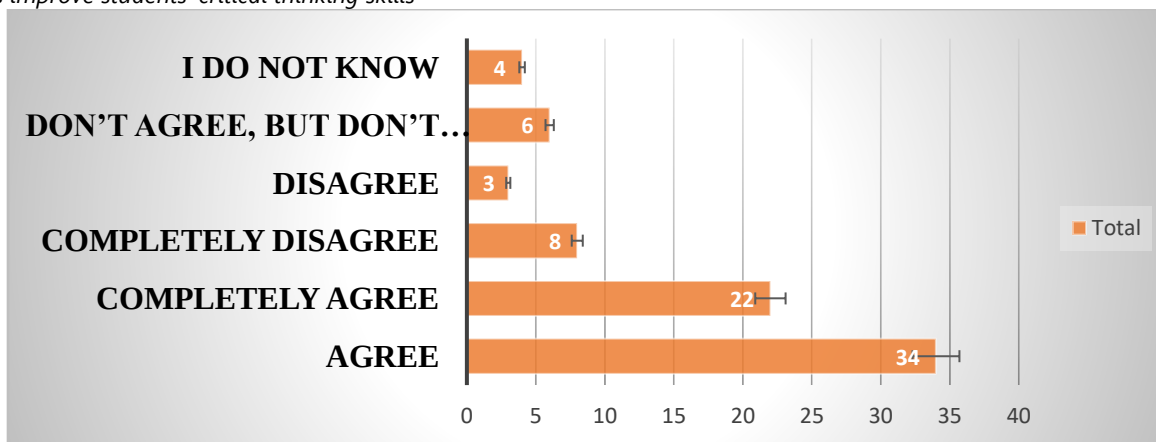
Figure 3*Portfolios improve students' critical thinking skills*

Figure 3 provides insight into the influence of portfolios on students' critical thinking skills. Specifically, it reveals that a significant majority of teachers—73%—believe that using portfolios effectively enhances students' critical thinking skills. In contrast, only 27% of teachers express disagreement with this perspective. This data suggests a strong consensus among teachers on the positive impact of portfolios in developing essential cognitive skills, which are crucial for students' academic growth and success. In the third question of the survey, teachers were asked to identify the specific types of assessments they consistently use in their teaching. Figure 6 illustrates the range of responses provided by participants, highlighting the most frequently utilised assessment methods in their classrooms. This data sheds light on the assessment strategies that are prioritised by teachers in their efforts to evaluate student learning and progress effectively.

The last question in the first section of the questionnaire asked teachers if they used portfolio assessment with their students. The teachers' responses are shown in the next chart:

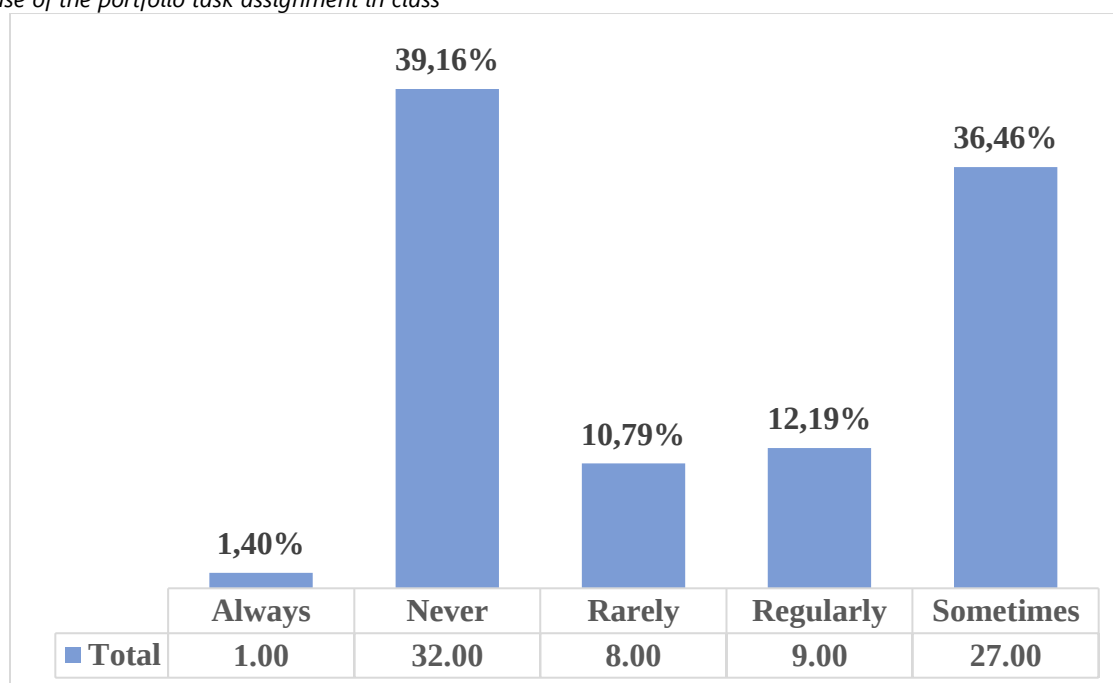
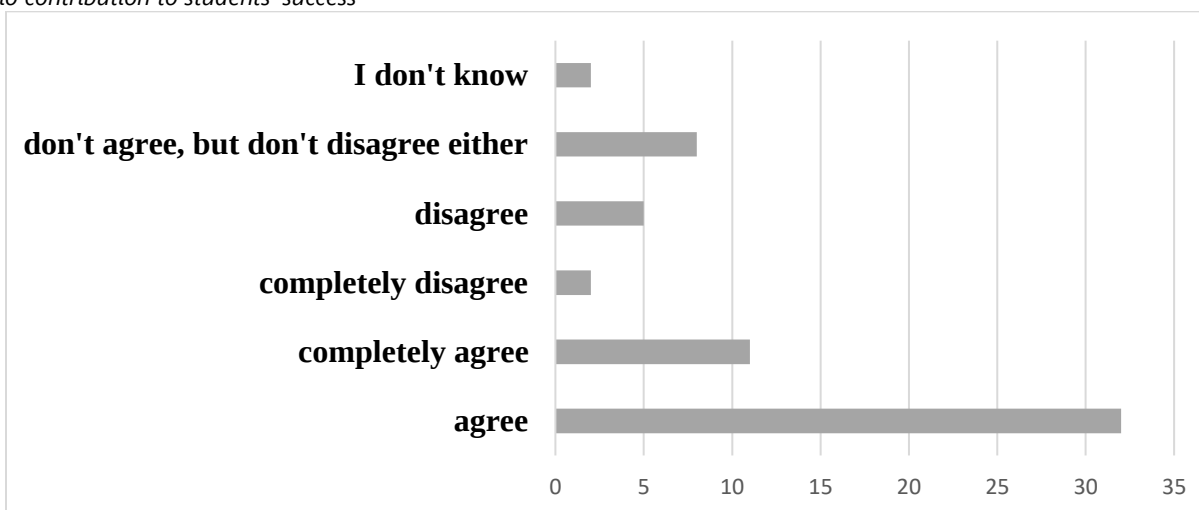
Figure 4*Teachers' use of the portfolio task assignment in class*

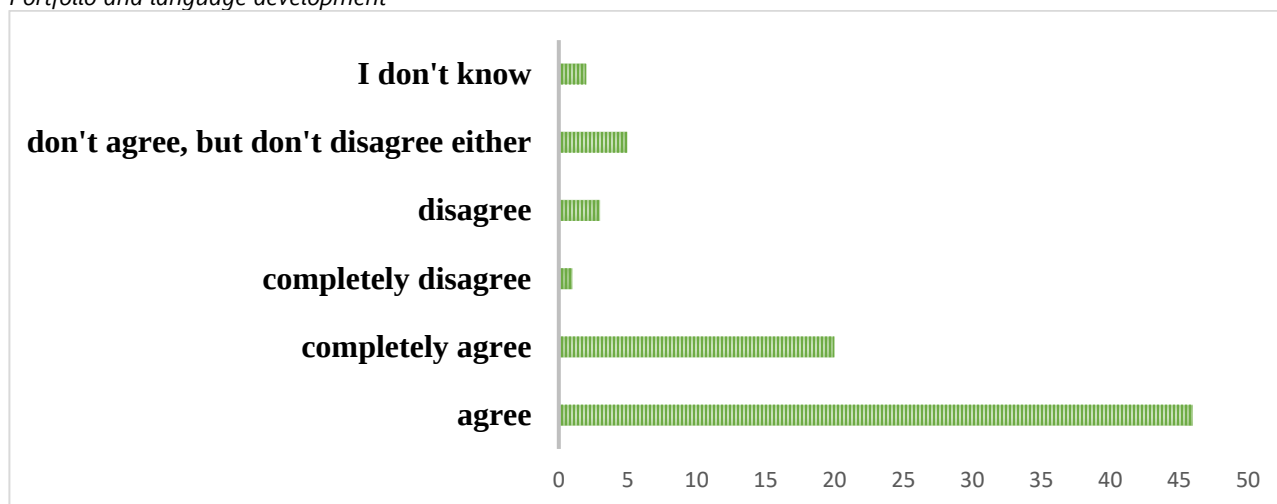
Figure 4 presented above reveals a significant trend among teachers regarding the use of portfolios in the classroom. A substantial majority indicated that they never incorporate portfolios as part of their teaching strategy. In contrast, a smaller segment, comprising 36.46% of respondents, reported occasionally using portfolios as a pedagogical tool to enhance student learning and reflection. Notably, only 1.40% of teachers reported consistently utilising portfolios in their educational practices with students. This data highlights teachers' prevalent reluctance or unfamiliarity with portfolio use as an effective learning resource.

Figure 5*Portfolio contribution to students' success*

What is striking about the above diagram is that the majority of teachers agreed that having a portfolio contributes to students' success.

Figure 6

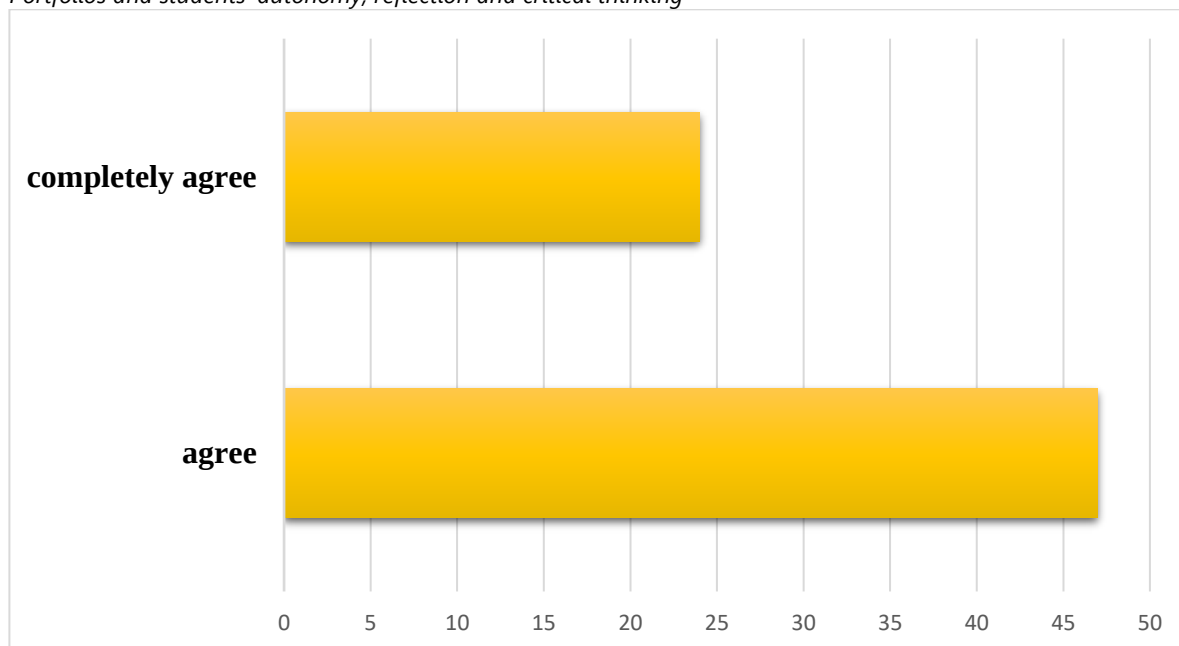
Portfolio and language development



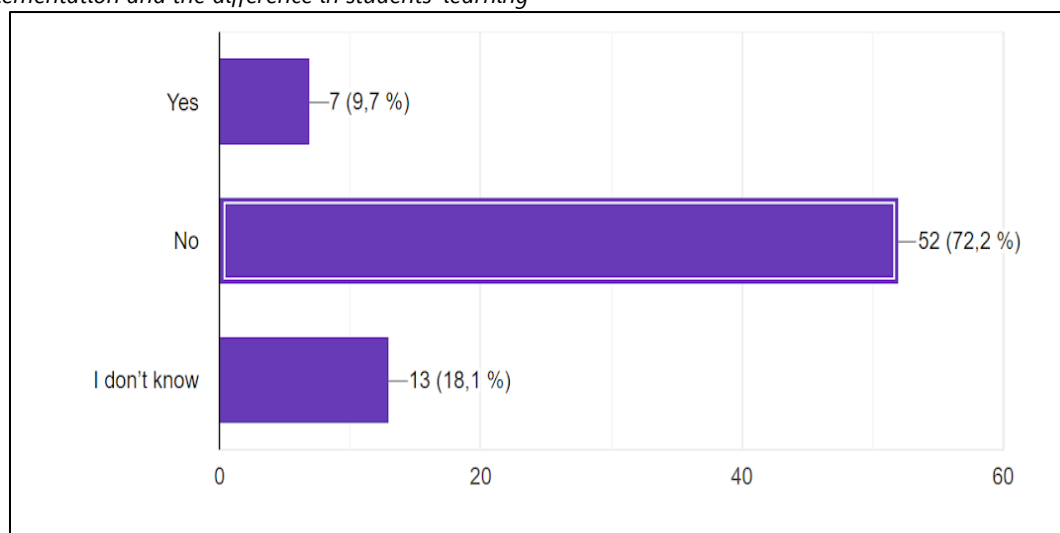
The table above clearly shows that the majority of students agree that having a portfolio can substantially help them and enhance their language skills.

Figure 7

Portfolios and students' autonomy, reflection and critical thinking



According to the previous figure, portfolios can help students become more autonomous, reflective learners and critical thinkers. The second question asked teachers whether portfolio implementation could cause any difference in students' learning by asking an indirect question, "Portfolio implementation does not cause any difference in students' learning". The responses of the participants are shown in the following chart:

Figure 8*Portfolio implementation and the difference in students' learning*

According to the above diagram, 72,2 % of the respondents said that portfolio implementation affected students' learning. 18,1% did not have the correct answer. Only 9,7 % said that portfolios do not affect learners.

This section presents the data collected via the questionnaire, which tried to answer research the main question that is about the attitudes of teachers towards the use of the portfolio task assignment as a tool to enhance critical thinking.

6. Data interpretation and discussion

The implementation of the portfolio in Moroccan middle school EFL classrooms is seen favourably by middle school instructors, according to the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire. They did, however, take issue with the absence of instruction on portfolio usage. The findings also showed a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices regarding the use of portfolios as an alternative teaching tool; EFL teachers acknowledge the value of portfolios in foreign language instruction. They do not, however, employ them in the classroom (Mokhtari, 2014).

Based on the current study's findings, it can be understood from the early beginning that teachers had positive feelings towards the use of the portfolio task as a pedagogical tool. This fact is clearly shown by the first two items in the questionnaire. When teachers were asked about alternative assessments, most thought the student's portfolio was an interesting educational tool. 70, 3% of teachers believed that portfolios are interesting; 32,4% said that portfolios are positive; 23% mentioned they are informative; 18,9% said they are necessary; 13,5% agreed they are attractive. In comparison, only 1,4% reported that portfolios are negative. This fact is supported by Mokhtari (2014), Rochelle (2008), and Chen (2002), arguing that portfolios are effective teaching and evaluation tools.

Besides, teachers found using the portfolio task assignment beneficial as it allowed teachers and students to collaborate in the teaching, learning and assessment process. This idea is affirmed by Paulson, Paulson and Meyer (1991) when they demonstrate that portfolio assessment allows teachers and students to observe students in a broader context: taking risks, developing creative solutions, and learning to make judgments about their own performances. Likewise, Adams (1998) asserts that a portfolio presents a wide perspective of the learning process for students and enables continuous feedback. This is further supported by De Fina (1992) as a portfolio enables students to have a self-assessment for their studies and learning and to review their progress. The data findings also affirm that teachers have positive views towards the use of the portfolio task as an alternative assessment tool, especially since the majority of the respondents reported that they were aware of the importance of using students' portfolios and agreed that implementing the portfolios would help teachers measure students' growth and development and would help students to demonstrate learning (Herrell, 2011).

Generally, some teachers use both traditional and alternative assessments. In contrast, others still use only traditional testing as the data demonstrated that 54,1 % of teachers regularly use both traditional and alternative assessments. In comparison, 41 % reported using only traditional testing methods. Based on their reviews, teachers can also brief administrators and parents on individual student growth. They can also design and use checklists and a set of descriptors to address the underlying points for which the portfolio has been used and keep a record of students' progress, as demonstrated by Tannenbaum (1996). This fact is also affirmed by Zessoules and Gardner (1991) when they stated that traditional assessments, such as classical tests or exams, did not give a clear picture of students' development and growth, so alternative assessment approaches, which are more student-centred when compared to conventional assessment and evaluation, should be preferred.

In addition, traditional testing has some drawbacks, as previously reported in some studies mentioned in the literature. The most striking limitation of traditional testing, as Atta-Alla (2012) demonstrates, is the lack of learner involvement. Despite traditional testing's limitations, teachers do not use alternative assessment tools with their students. The study findings showed that most teachers, 66,2 % of respondents, reported not using alternative assessment tools with their students. To remedy the situation, 33,8 % of teachers suggested using other alternative assessment tools such as presentations and projects. However, according to the study results, many teachers reported never using portfolios with their students. In contrast, some teachers indicated that they sometimes use the portfolio as a learning tool in class. Therefore, alternative assessment needs to be used alongside traditional testing to evaluate learners' growth. In this respect, Century (2002) recommended that traditional testing and alternative assessment methods be used together as they complement each other. Century (2002) study findings revealed that traditional testing focuses on cognitive content learning in contrast to alternative assessment, which is process-oriented. Alternative assessment emphasises educational aspects such as cooperative learning and critical thinking skills.

In investigating the attitudes of the teachers regarding the use of the portfolio as a pedagogical tool, the research revealed that teachers had positive attitudes toward the idea that portfolio assessment improves students' learning through the worksheets that they do in the classroom which is fun and especially when students develop their sense of accomplishment when they write self-reflection for following the lesson and realise that they have learned something and have grown academically. Hence, portfolio assessment enables students to reflect on their actual performance, show their weak and strong domains, observe their progress during the learning process, and encourage them to take responsibility for their learning. Hence, teachers perceived alternative assessment as more process-oriented. As Zessoules and Gardner (1991) state, alternative assessment cares more about the developmental process, so teachers support alternative assessment more. Therefore, they were positive about having alternative assessment types in their classrooms. According to Johnstone et al. (2000), alternative assessment measures meaningful learning, and teachers agree with them, as shown by the present study's findings. In addition, teachers claimed that alternative assessment makes students more creative. By using their creativity skills more, students found themselves more motivated based on the results they achieved.

According to the study findings, supervisors rarely talk to teachers about alternative assessments or arrange meetings about alternative and portfolio assessments. Also, most teachers (49,3 %) know nothing about supervisors' attitudes towards using portfolios as an alternative assessment tool. However, another group of teachers said that their supervisors have a positive attitude towards the use of the portfolio as an alternative assessment. 38,4 % of respondents reported that their supervisors consider portfolio assessment a good assessment tool. Based on these findings, supervisors are crucial social agents who can shape teachers' attitudes towards portfolio assessment. Supervisors can heavily contribute to making teachers fully aware of the value of portfolio assessment during pedagogical meetings, for instance.

In addition to supervisors, teachers are another essential category of people who can influence teachers and shape their attitudes either positively or negatively towards using portfolios in class. The results of the present study displayed that most teachers, in reality, still do not understand the value of using portfolios as a tool for assessing students' learning, which is sometimes because teachers at work rarely talk to each other about the student portfolio, teachers rarely share samples of their students' portfolios and they never tell each other what alternative assessment tool to implement in class.

The last social agents who shape the teachers' attitudes are students. The study revealed that most teachers never ask their students to develop portfolios. However, some teachers recommend portfolios and ask students to develop them at intervals of a month or a few months and the end of each unit or two units. Besides, the study also revealed that students never talked to teachers about previous experiences related to the portfolio and never asked teachers if they could use a portfolio. This reality means that students are not aware of portfolio projects, which might be due to the teachers' lack of awareness. However, contrary to this study's findings, some previously mentioned studies in the literature showed that students are aware of portfolio assessment, especially when Johnstone et al. (2000) demonstrated that students agreed that alternative assessment measures meaningful learning; they did not support the idea that exams could show the exact results of students' progress. In addition, students demonstrated evidence that supports claims that alternative assessment makes students more creative. Students, therefore, found themselves more motivated, according to the results, by using their creativity skills more. (Johnstone et al., 2000) Although teachers reported that students found alternative assessments interesting, the findings of this study indicated that students still preferred some traditional forms of assessment. They expressed a preference for familiar methods such as fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions. This preference may stem from their greater familiarity with these traditional assessment types. While a minority of students supported alternative assessments, most were only partially in favour, suggesting they were undecided on the topic. Overall, students exhibited uncertainty about assessment methods, showing support for both alternative and traditional approaches. It seems that students may require more time and greater access to alternative assessment methods in order to form concrete opinions. As they gain more experience, their views on alternative assessments may evolve. This aligns with Stone's (1990) argument that students need new practices in order to choose the most appropriate assessment methods.

Moreover, the findings revealed that some students supported both traditional and alternative assessments in general, as they found the latter motivating and appealing. These students had positive attitudes towards portfolio assessment, considering it one of the best learning activities. Students sometimes find portfolio assessment interesting and never refuse to work on their

portfolios. The data collected revealed a significant fact: Students rarely talk to their teachers about their experience with portfolios. They also never ask their teachers to help them create their portfolios. This means their teachers did not use portfolio assessment with students in their previous classes. According to Brown (2004), the portfolio system is widely held to foster intrinsic motivation and responsibility, individualise learning, provide tangible evidence of a student's work, offer opportunities for collaborative work with peers, and facilitate critical thinking. Additionally, the present study revealed that both teachers and students admitted that portfolio assessment has many advantages and profoundly impacts students' skills.

According to the study findings, the burden of the portfolio on both teachers and students outweighs the benefits. Based on the findings, most teachers, constituting 66,2% of the total population, demonstrated that the students themselves are the main obstacle to implementing the students' portfolio in EFL classrooms. In comparison, 57,7 % of the teachers reported that such obstacles are mainly due to the teacher's perception and attitudes. 53,5 % of the respondents associated these obstacles with the type of curriculum being adopted. Most teachers associated these challenges with a lack of information, training, and time constraints, with 61,1 % respectively. 47,2 % said that sometimes insufficient resources are another obstacle to portfolio assessment. 33,3 % report that the drawbacks of portfolio implementation are sometimes due to students' refusal to work. 27,8 % of the respondents indicated that portfolios are time-consuming. However, 11,1 % of teachers linked the obstacles to the teachers themselves, saying they reject alternative assessments. These obstacles to the implementation of portfolio assessment are affirmed by Harmer (2007), who said that a portfolio is time-consuming and requires some training on the part of teachers on how to select items from the portfolio and how to grade them.

Moreover, the time-consuming procedure has also been frequently mentioned as one of the shortcomings of alternative assessment compared to paper-and-pencil tests. Struyven et. al. (2002) also affirm this reality when they say that the most damaging aspect of creating a portfolio is that students spend much time on the required assignments. Another major criticism revealed by the study findings is that alternative assessment is too challenging due to the inconsistency of marking criteria and grading schemes. However, the wealth of information provided by alternative assessment approaches is undeniable. As Hamayan (1995) believes, this information must minimally serve as a context for a more valid interpretation of all standardised test results. This explains why the literature has used alternative terminology to refer to alternative assessments, such as "supplementary" or "complementary". Alternative assessment procedures do not replace summative assessment and standardised test scores but complement these scores with ongoing and comprehensive assessment measures.

Another ultimate problem when using portfolios in Moroccan schools is the large class. Most Moroccan classes consist of more than 30 or even more than 40 students. With so many students in the classroom, it is understandable that a teacher finds it too hard to manage and use portfolios in an expected way. In addition, the study found that students faced challenges regarding the large number of tasks involved in the portfolio and the lack of a precise organisation and selection process. These findings agree with Davis et al. (2009), in which portfolio assessment was seen as a very demanding process that takes much time for students and interferes with their learning process and time. Well-trained, skilled, professional teachers are required to make this assessment work well in the field. Using portfolios in Moroccan schools is also a potential burden since we do not have many teachers with that competence. The government, therefore, should train some teachers to achieve the skills. Well-designed intensive professional training is essential to prepare teachers to use this portfolio assessment.

Therefore, having a clear explanation and understanding of how a portfolio may be beneficial is crucial. Despite having many benefits, there also exist challenges in implementing portfolios in teaching and learning, particularly with the issue of practicality. Researchers and practitioners must consider the time, cost, effort and administration. Many researchers often report that the implementation of the portfolio is time-consuming. As Lo (2010) points out in her action research:

The reading and grading load was enormous, as was that of answering students' questions. For questions I could not answer, I had to spend time locating answers as well. Despite the greatly reduced number of questions, the reading and grading load was still very heavy. To meet the administration's deadline for submitting final grades, I was forced to write short comments and had no time to correct grammatical errors. The six entries I had insisted on to establish the habit of reading newspapers had become a massive burden for me. (p. 87)

7. Conclusion

The questionnaire data yielded findings that addressed the research question and achieved the study objectives. The present study explored the attitudes of teachers in Moroccan middle schools towards using the portfolio task assignment as a pedagogical tool to enhance critical thinking. In light of the data collected using the questionnaire, it was found that teachers in middle schools have positive attitudes towards implementing the portfolio task assignment in Moroccan middle school EFL classrooms. However, they complained about a lack of training regarding the use of portfolios. Besides, data revealed a gap between teachers' views towards using the portfolio as an alternative educational tool and their actual practices, meaning that EFL teachers admit the role portfolios can play in foreign language classes (Mokhtari, 2014). However, they do not use them in classrooms.

The conclusions derived from this study carry important theoretical implications for educators and teachers. It is crucial for them to understand the significance of the portfolio task assignment and to promote the adoption of the portfolios not only among middle school students but also among those in high school and university. This approach will equip students to be leaders in addressing the challenges and demands of the 21st century and the evolving technological age. In light of the findings of the

present study and those of the various studies reviewed in the literature, portfolios, as both teaching and assessment tools, make many positive contributions to teaching and evaluation. Portfolio development is one of the most popular alternative assessment types, especially within the communicative language teaching framework. Portfolios help students develop their critical thinking skills and foster their sense of responsibility for learning, which can help them become more autonomous, reflective, and independent learners and thinkers. Besides, portfolios are practical tools for involving learners, improving teaching and learning, and reflecting on assessment reform. Portfolios are recognised as an authentic assessment of students' learning because they demonstrate classroom experience, link the knowledge studied in class to students' skills, reflect students' abilities and achievements, and involve realistic, relevant materials that require students to create real-life products.

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