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| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Impact of the Student Portfolio on Learning Outcomes in Moroccan Middle Schools

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| **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on implementing portfolios as an alternative assessment instrument that accurately reflects classroom performance. Portfolios are believed to enhance learning and to measure students' academic ability. The primary aim of this study is to thoroughly examine the significance of the student portfolio as a portfolio-based learning method within the context of teaching English as a foreign language in Moroccan middle schools. Through an in-depth analysis, the study aims to investigate the impact of student portfolios on student learning and to elucidate the factors that influence their use in the Moroccan context. This research offers valuable insights into the potential effects and challenges of integrating the student portfolio into the instruction of English as a foreign language in Moroccan middle schools. The study employed the questionnaire as a research instrument to collect data, which was analysed using the SPSS method. The study findings indicated that portfolios are essential in EFL instruction, significantly enhancing student learning and providing considerable educational advantages. Nonetheless, various elements influence the execution of the student portfolio within the Moroccan context.

| **KEYWORDS**

Student portfolio, portfolio-based learning, portfolio assessment, performance-based assessment, learner-centeredness.

1. Introduction

Morocco has experienced a significant transformation in its pedagogical approaches, particularly in language education. This shift is marked by an increasing emphasis on the competencies students are expected to acquire and refine throughout their learning journey. As a result, there is a growing demand for fostering autonomous learning, where students take greater responsibility for their educational progress (MEN, 2009). This transition in language instruction underscores the need for more effective performance-based assessment within the English curriculum of middle schools. Such assessment could closely align with the principles of the competency-based education, which focuses on ensuring that students grasp theoretical knowledge and apply their skills in practical contexts (MEN, 2009). Despite this progressive shift, some teachers continue to utilise conventional assessment methods, such as standardised examinations and quizzes, which may not fully capture students' competencies or learning potential. These traditional approaches can limit opportunities for a more holistic evaluation of students' abilities. Assessment methods must evolve to effectively support learners of Moroccan English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL). They should be designed to reflect the competencies outlined in the language textbooks widely used in Moroccan classrooms (MEN, 2009). By aligning assessments with these competencies, teachers can better gauge students' understanding, provide more meaningful feedback, and ultimately enhance the learning experience for all students.

For these reasons and to concretely record and evaluate students' growth and development over time, the student portfolio remains an effective tool for achieving such an objective. Portfolios serve multiple vital functions in education, playing a significant role in assessment and student engagement. According to McMillan (2015), portfolios are indispensable tools for systematically

collecting student progress and development data over time. A portfolio is a deliberate, systematic procedure for gathering and assessing student work to record advancement toward meeting educational objectives. This definition underscores the intentional nature of portfolios, which allows educators to track individual milestones and growth in a structured way (McMillan, 2015). In line with this, Zollman and Jones (1994) highlight that portfolios are valuable assessment tools that foster student self-reflection. By actively engaging in portfolio creation, students invest in their own learning, think critically about their work, and identify both their strengths and areas for improvement. Dochy and McDowell (1997) further argue that portfolios enhance intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to set personal goals and pursue meaningful interests, which fosters a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Additionally, portfolios connect academic work to real-world applications, thereby bridging the gap between theory and practice. They showcase students' achievements and the skills they've developed, preparing them for future challenges. Additionally, Mokhtaria (2015) notes that portfolios promote a dynamic pedagogical approach and reflect evolving assessment practices. They allow students to demonstrate progress, reflect on their learning journeys, and provide educators with insights into student growth, strengthening the relationship between learners and instructors (Mokhtaria, 2015).

The student portfolio is a performance-based assessment tool that provides an alternative approach to evaluation. It "requires students to construct a response, create a product, or demonstrate the application of knowledge" in a real-world context (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 239). This method focuses on evaluating specific course criteria through authentic assessments. According to Gronlund and Waugh (2009), "performance assessment is any evaluation that requires students to exhibit their understanding and skills through tasks." Chun (2010) adds that this type of assessment measures students' abilities to apply knowledge and skills through higher-order thinking tasks. These tasks can range from simple responses to complex objectives and are designed to assess language abilities in realistic situations. Ultimately, performance-based assessments encourage students to actively engage in the learning process and foster self-discovery rather than passively receiving information from the teacher (O'Malley & Pierce, 1996). Portfolio assessment, therefore, is an ongoing process where students and teachers collaborate to select samples of student work that showcase growth (Hancock, 1994). A portfolio consists of curated student work and related materials that reflect performance. It may include final pieces, reflections on strengths and weaknesses, and works-in-progress, such as essays. Each item serves a specific purpose, and students must thoughtfully choose what to include. The primary goal of a portfolio is to enable learners to document and present their learning to others, thereby promoting independence and autonomy (Paulson & Meyer, 1991).

2. Review of the literature

While portfolio assessment is widely supported in education, it is essential to provide evidence of how this method enhances student learning. Research indicates that students who engage in portfolio creation demonstrate deeper and more meaningful understanding compared to those who do not (Buckley et al., 2009). Portfolios promote self-reflection, critical thinking, and the integration of knowledge across various subjects. They allow students to showcase their work over time, highlighting growth in ways that traditional assessments cannot. Despite challenges such as time constraints and varying student engagement, the benefits of portfolio assessment, like fostering deeper learning and personal responsibility, make it a valuable pedagogical tool in modern education.

2.1. Impact of portfolio on learning

Numerous studies have shown that portfolio assessment enhances student learning. A notable study by Valdez (2001) focused on 7th-grade life science, demonstrating that portfolio evaluation allowed students to track their progress over time. By creating and maintaining their portfolios, students actively engaged with their learning, showcasing assignments and reflecting on their understanding. This reflective practice encouraged critical thinking about their work and concepts studied. Ultimately, Valdez's findings highlighted the advantages of portfolio assessment in fostering a more engaged learning environment.

A relevant study by Dori (2003) examined the learning outcomes of senior high school students in chemistry and biology, using two experimental groups and two control groups. The research investigated the effectiveness of alternative assessment methods, particularly student portfolios, in the experimental groups. These groups employed various strategies to foster critical thinking, while the control groups relied on traditional methods focused on rote memorisation. The results showed a significant improvement in the academic performance of students in the experimental groups, who scored higher on assessments requiring analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This suggests that alternative assessment methods, such as portfolios, can improve learning outcomes in the sciences (Dori, 2003).

In the same context, Century (2002) highlighted that traditional standardised testing primarily emphasises the acquisition of cognitive knowledge, often employing rigid formats such as multiple-choice questions. In contrast, alternative assessment methods focus on evaluating the learning process by measuring student engagement with the material, collaboration, and critical thinking skills. To address this gap, Century (2002) underscored the importance of integrating both approaches. By complementing one another, traditional testing and alternative methods provide a more comprehensive understanding of student performance and identify areas for improvement.

2.2. Factors affecting the use of the student portfolio in EFL classes

Portfolio assessment is gaining popularity as an alternative assessment tool among educators, serving both teaching and assessment purposes. Buckley et al. (2009) describe it as a "learning and assessment tool," showcasing evidence of the learning process (p. 283). However, challenges such as the curriculum style, students' readiness, and teachers' attitudes can affect its implementation in English as a foreign language classes. Curriculum-related factors significantly influence the use of portfolios in English as a foreign language classroom. Recent changes in pedagogical theory have led to student-centred communicative methodologies that prioritise language function and the learning process. Supporters of process-oriented instruction promote alternative assessment methods. Flood and Lapp (1989) highlighted the growing popularity of portfolios as an alternative to standardised testing for evaluating student performance. In some schools, alternative assessments are endorsed by the curriculum and integrated into student evaluations. For instance, educators in California are assessing reading and writing portfolios within the California Assessment Program (Shepard, 1989).

In addition to curriculum-related factors, self-regulated learning has a significant influence on how students utilise portfolios. According to Pintrich (2000), self-regulated learning has gained considerable scholarly attention. Bandura (1986) defines it as the proactive effort by students to utilise emotional, cognitive, and environmental resources during learning. This includes self-observation and reflection, enabling students to assess their development. Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) argue that self-regulation is closely linked to motivation, stating it involves activating and sustaining thoughts, behaviours, and emotions toward achieving goals. The theory of self-regulated learning explains how individuals acquire complex competencies across various domains. Self-regulated learners can set objectives and monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behaviour based on their goals and environmental context (Pintrich, 2000).

In conclusion, portfolios offer significant benefits for students, such as self-reflection, personalised learning, and a visible demonstration of progress. However, certain limitations can hinder their practical use in classrooms, especially in EFL settings. Challenges often arise from the design of the curriculum. If the curriculum lacks flexibility for portfolio integration, it restricts teachers' ability to use these assessments effectively. Additionally, the focus on standardised testing may diminish the perceived value of portfolios, leading to resistance. Students' motivation and readiness to manage portfolios can also be obstacles. Some may feel overwhelmed by the responsibility or lack the skills for critical reflection, which can affect their engagement in the learning process. Teachers' attitudes toward portfolio assessment are crucial for success. If educators are not trained or do not recognise the benefits, they may avoid implementing portfolios. Limited institutional support can further contribute to inconsistent application. While portfolios have the potential to enhance student learning, addressing these challenges is vital for their effective integration into EFL classrooms.

3. Methodology

This section provides an overview of the research methodology employed to investigate the impact of the student portfolio on teaching English as a foreign language in Moroccan middle schools, as well as the challenges associated with implementing this performance-based assessment tool. It outlines key components of the research approach, including the research design, methodology, guiding hypothesis, and research questions. Additionally, it describes the data collection instruments, research variables, population sample, and data analysis methods.

3.1. Research design

This study employs a quantitative research design, with a questionnaire as a data collection tool. Mertons (2009) describes quantitative research design as "research that measures variables in a quantifiable way" (p.3). This design examines the results of an experience, and the quantitative technique validity relies on the numerical data accuracy (Bryman, 2004). The questionnaire was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Software to compute the percentages of responses and draw pertinent conclusions. It questionnaire explores two primary questions: first, how student portfolios influence learning outcomes in educational settings, and second, what factors affect the implementation and usage of portfolios in English as a foreign language classrooms in Morocco. By examining these aspects, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of both the benefits of student portfolios and the challenges teachers might face in incorporating portfolios into their teaching practices.

3.2. Research variables

This study focused on two key research variables. The independent variable is the student portfolio, which is a systematic collection of student work that reflects their learning journey and achievements. The dependent variable, on the other hand, is student learning outcomes, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students acquire as a result of their educational experiences. By examining the relationship between these two variables, the study aims to investigate how the use of the student portfolio can impact the learning outcomes of students and what challenges teachers might face while implementing the portfolio project in Moroccan middle school classrooms.

3.3. Sample

To thoroughly investigate the influence of portfolios on student learning and the various factors that affect their implementation in Moroccan EFL middle school classes, it is crucial to gather a representative sample of the relevant population. This study employed a carefully designed questionnaire as the primary research tool to collect detailed data. The target participants for this study were English teachers working in middle schools across Morocco, allowing for an in-depth analysis of their experiences and perspectives regarding the use of portfolios in the classroom. This approach aims to provide valuable insights into how portfolios can enhance educational practices and learning outcomes. The following table displays the regional academies where the respondents come from:

Table 1

Regional Distribution of the Respondents

		Fréquence	Pourcentage	Pourcentage cumulé
	Tanger-Tetouan-El Houcima	55	71,4	71,4
	Beni mellal khenifra	1	1,3	72,7
	Rabat, salé, Kenitra	6	7,8	80,5
	Casablanca Settat	3	3,9	84,4
	Draa Tafilalt	2	2,6	87,0
	Souss Massa	1	1,3	88,3
	Fes-Meknes	7	9,1	97,4
	Marrakech- Safi	2	2,6	100,0
	Total	77	100,0	

The table above indicates that eight regional academies participated in the questionnaire survey. However, the majority of respondents were from the Tanger-Tetouan-El Houcima region, accounting for 71.4% of the total responses. In contrast, the regions of Beni Mellal-Khenifra and Souss-Massa had the fewest respondents, each contributing only 1.3%.

3.4. Significance of the study

Alternative assessment methods have gained attention from educators and academics worldwide, focusing on evaluating student learning through means other than traditional testing. Understanding how portfolios can enhance learning and the challenges of implementing them in Moroccan EFL classrooms is crucial. This study aims to inform Moroccan EFL teachers about the benefits of using student portfolios for performance-based learning and assessment while addressing the challenges they face. Additionally, the investigation offers recommendations to stakeholders, including policymakers and educators, to enhance the educational experience.

3.5. Statement of the problem

With the increasing demand for autonomous learning in the Moroccan educational system, educators recognise the importance of nurturing self-directed learners. In August 2009, the Ministry of Education introduced the English Language Guidelines for Middle Schools, which emphasised the need for performance assessments in the English curriculum to support competency-based learning (MEN, 2009). These guidelines were designed to help teachers teach and assess students in relation to the competencies outlined in the guidelines and textbooks. However, some teachers still rely on traditional assessment methods, such as tests and quizzes, which often fail to reflect the required competencies. This disconnect challenges the practical assessment of students' language skills. As a result, student portfolios have emerged as a valuable tool to connect competency-based learning with actual classroom practices.

3.6. Objective of the study

This study examines the significant role of student portfolios as an innovative approach to portfolio-based learning in English language instruction for foreign learners in Moroccan middle schools. It explores how student portfolios can enhance the language learning experience by examining their impact on learner achievement and self-assessment skills. The research also identifies factors that affect the implementation and effectiveness of portfolio-based learning, including cultural influences, institutional dynamics, and resource availability. Ultimately, the study aims to provide insights into the benefits of using student portfolios in English instruction while addressing the challenges teachers may encounter in Moroccan middle schools.

3.7. Research questions

The investigation specifically addressed the following two research questions concerning the significance and challenges of incorporating student portfolios in Moroccan middle schools:

RQ1. What is the impact of the student portfolio on learning outcomes?

RQ2. What factors influence the use of the student portfolio in Moroccan Middle school EFL classrooms?

3.8. Research hypotheses

The research hypotheses for this study are outlined below:

H1: Implementing the student portfolio in Moroccan English as a foreign language classroom has a positive influence on learning outcomes.

H2: Different factors can affect the implementation of the student portfolio in Moroccan Middle school EFL classrooms.

4. Study results

The data was collected via the questionnaire as a research instrument. It aims to explore the effects of portfolio assessment on students' learning outcomes and the factors that might hinder the implementation of portfolio assessment in Moroccan Middle school classrooms. The questionnaire was organised into two main sections. The first section focuses on understanding how the use of portfolios influences students' academic performance and overall learning outcomes. It seeks to identify how portfolios contribute to student engagement and learning. The second section examines the challenges teachers face when implementing portfolio assessments in their classrooms. This includes investigating the various obstacles they may encounter, such as time constraints, insufficient professional development, inadequate resources, and differing perceptions of assessment efficacy among colleagues.

4.1. Questionnaire section 1: The impact of the student portfolio on learning outcomes

The first section of the questionnaire addressed the first research question, which concerns the impact of the student portfolio on learning outcomes. It aimed to tackle two interconnected enquiries. The first question assesses the impact of the student portfolio on the learning process. In contrast, the subsequent question examines the execution of the portfolio and its effect on students' learning outcomes. The following diagram pertains to the primary question concerning the impact of the portfolio on learning:
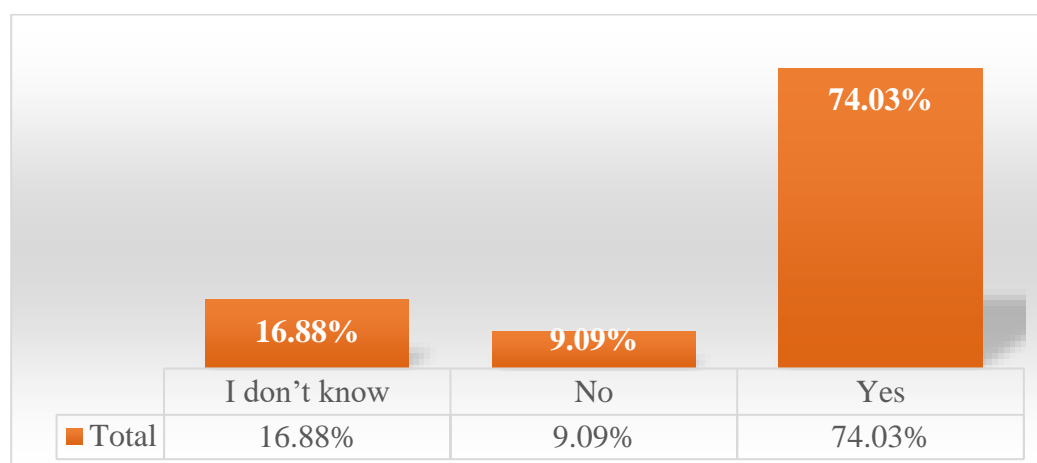
Figure 1

Portfolio impact on learning
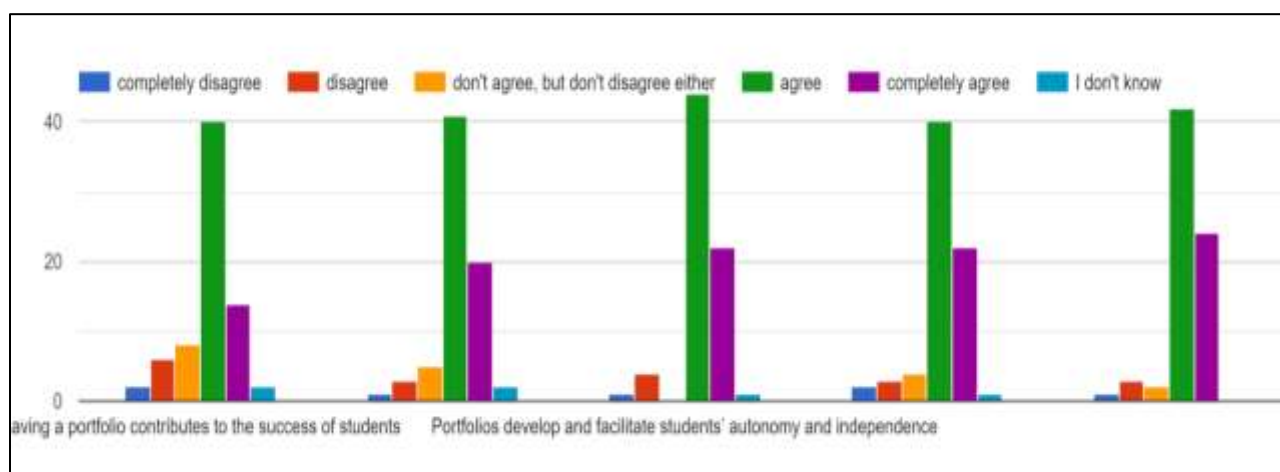
The diagram above indicates that a significant majority of teachers believed that portfolios play a crucial role in enhancing student success. They added that portfolios help students improve their language skills and foster greater autonomy and independence. Furthermore, teachers pointed out that portfolio assessment effectively facilitates and enriches the learning process. Ultimately, teachers view portfolios as instrumental in developing students into more autonomous, reflective, and independent learners and thinkers. The second question inquired if the use of portfolios could impact students' learning outcomes. The subsequent chart illustrates the participants' responses:

Figure 2

The impact of portfolio implementation on students' learning outcomes

	I don't know	No	Yes
■ Total	16.88%	9.09%	74.03%

The data presented in Figure 2 indicate that 74.03% of respondents believe that the implementation of portfolios has a significant influence on students' learning outcomes. However, 18.1% of respondents were unaware of the potential impact of portfolios on learning. In contrast, 9.09% expressed the opinion that portfolios do not contribute to learning.

4.2. Questionnaire section 2: Factors that affect the use of the student portfolio in Moroccan Middle school EFL classrooms

The second section of the questionnaire addressed the second research question, which concerns the factors that influence the use of student portfolios in Moroccan Middle school EFL classrooms. The first question in this section aims to identify the fundamental challenges encountered when implementing student portfolios in EFL classrooms, as illustrated in the subsequent figure.

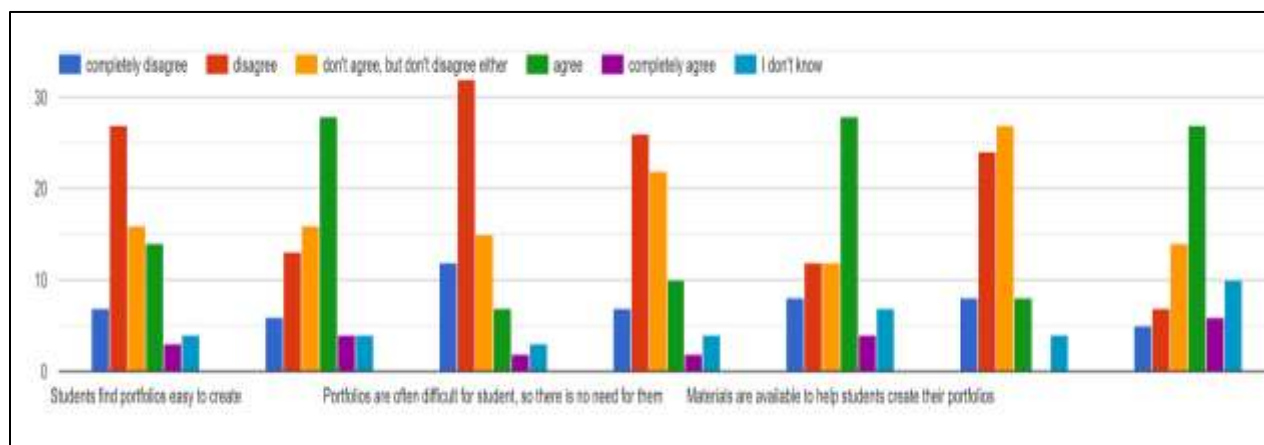**Figure 3**

Problems Encountered by Students

Figure 3 indicates that teachers believe students struggle with creating portfolios. However, they disagree with the idea that portfolios are unnecessary; they acknowledge that, although portfolios can be challenging for students, ample resources are available to help them. Furthermore, the chart reveals that while some teachers are neutral about whether portfolios pose difficulties for educators, others clearly state that portfolios do not present any significant issue for them. Concerning the textbook's focus, most teachers agree that it contains a variety of tasks that can effectively serve as entries in students' portfolios.

The second question in this section examines the factors that affect the implementation of portfolio assessment in English as a Foreign Language classroom. Key determinants include the type of curriculum adopted, students' willingness and preparedness, and teachers' perceptions and attitudes. The following figure presents the findings of this inquiry:

Figure 4

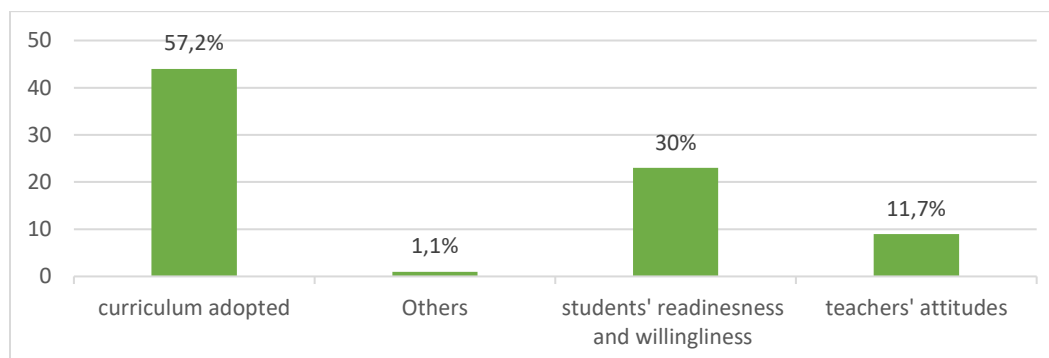Obstacles to implementing the student portfolio

Figure 4 illustrates that 57.2% of teachers attribute the challenges in implementing portfolios in Moroccan EFL classrooms to the specific curriculum being utilised. Furthermore, 30% of teachers identified students as another significant barrier to the successful implementation of student portfolios, while 11.7% linked these obstacles to teachers' attitudes. Only 1.1% of respondents cited other factors as contributing to these challenges.

The final question in this section concerns the challenges and obstacles that teachers encounter when implementing alternative evaluation methods in the classroom. The following chart displays the challenges encountered by teachers:

Figure 5

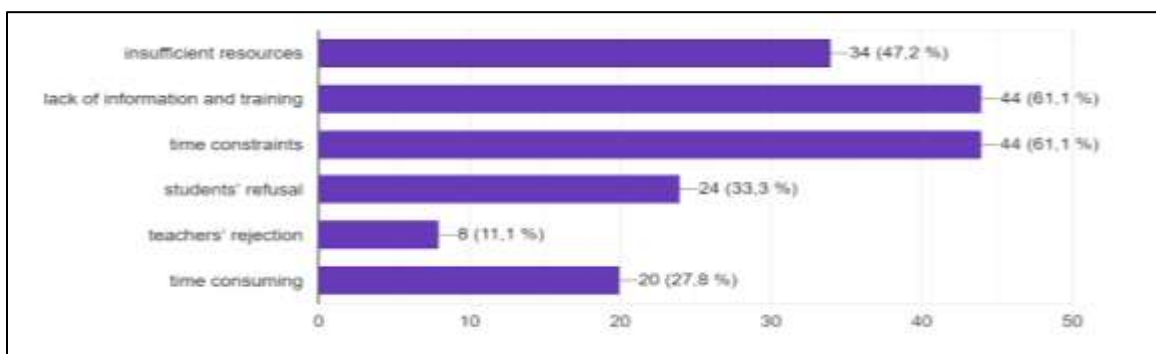The Obstacles to Alternative Assessment

Figure 5 demonstrates that a significant majority of teachers identified challenges in portfolio assessment as being primarily linked to a lack of information and training, with 61.1% citing these issues. Additionally, 47.2% noted that insufficient resources can occasionally present another challenge. Furthermore, 33.3% reported that student reluctance to engage can sometimes impede the effective implementation of portfolios. Moreover, 27.8% of respondents indicated that the time-consuming nature of portfolios is a concern. Lastly, 11.1% attributed certain obstacles to the mindset of some teachers, who resist adopting alternative assessment methods.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicated that most teachers hold positive beliefs about portfolios. It was revealed that the use of portfolios as a teaching tool could have a positive impact which includes improving student's performance, supporting language development, promoting autonomy, and encouraging reflective thinking. This effect of portfolio use is grounded in the previous research which acclaims the fact that portfolio assessment fosters independent thinking in students as highlighted by Hancock (1994). Additionally, results allowed the finding that while actively selecting works for their portfolios, students are motivated to track their progress and set future goals, building confidence and enhancing their organisational skills. Therefore, alternative assessment is vital for evaluating students' linguistic development and for developing learning because portfolios act as both a teaching and assessment tool as demonstrated by Buckley et al., (2009) who consider portfolios as assessment tools and instruments that support student development. More support for this finding has been provided by Barton and Collins (1997) and Norman (1998) who affirm that portfolio assessment helps educators identify students' needs and improve their learning outcomes.

In spite of the fact that portfolios are not easy to implement in class due to the factors revealed by the study, teachers expressed concerns about implementing portfolio assessments and provided suggestions for improvement. In this connection, the findings stress the idea that the implementation of portfolio-based assessment can be reached in class as long as both teachers and students are willing to get engaged in the portfolio project. This finding is supported by Hancock (1994), who argues that the use of a student's portfolio for teaching and assessment requires a joint effort from both students and teachers. In light of Hancock's (1994) claim as well as the findings of this study, it is worth-noting that despite the challenges of implementing portfolio assessment in class, it remains a beneficial progressive process which involves continuous collaboration between students and teachers to optimise learning as argued by (Dori, 2003) and assess progress using non-conventional strategies.

6. Conclusion

This study highlighted the crucial role of portfolios in English as a foreign language instruction and examined the factors that influence the implementation of this pedagogical tool in Moroccan EFL classrooms. The findings indicated that portfolio assessment empowers students to identify effective learning environments, articulate their educational goals, and cultivate autonomy, despite the challenges that may arise during its implementation. Teachers highlighted that portfolios provide valuable insights into effective teaching practices and underscore the importance of incorporating them into EFL classrooms to prepare students for the 21st century adequately. Moreover, the use of portfolios in Moroccan classrooms has had a positive impact on students' language skills and motivation. Successful implementation of portfolios relies on tailored approaches that prevent student overwhelm, alongside the inclusion of alternative assessment methods and appropriate teacher training. Furthermore, portfolios facilitate reflection through authentic work samples, which help evaluate student development. The study recommends four key actions: (1) provide comprehensive teacher training focused on best practices, (2) revise textbooks to include tasks that support portfolio development, (3) reduce the curriculum's burden to allocate more time for assignments, and (4) integrate portfolios into ongoing assessments to foster greater student engagement. In conclusion, while portfolios enhance academic performance and intrinsic motivation, their successful implementation in EFL classes necessitates careful planning.

7. Limitations and lines for future research

As is the case with any research, this paper has several limitations that need to be addressed. However, some researchers in the same field may appreciate its findings. Regarding the context and participants, the researchers focused on teachers and students in middle school education. Therefore, teachers and students from other levels, namely primary school and high school, were excluded. Additionally, a limited number of students had the opportunity to create their portfolios. Despite these limitations, the contribution of this paper to a better understanding of the topic investigated is undeniable. Meanwhile, it offers lines for future research on the same topic. First, the study attempted to examine a topic that requires sincere consideration in its specific context, where the use of the portfolio as a teaching and assessment tool does not receive its due importance. While placing focus on middle school, future studies may shed light on the same topic in other contexts, including high schools. In this regard, it would be of interest to allow high school students to experience building their portfolios while examining their teachers' perspectives on the topic.

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