

The Use of a Portfolio to Enhance Authentic Assessment among In-service Student-Teachers' in Social Studies Education at the University of Botswana

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Abstract

This study examines a set of portfolios developed by a group of Bachelor of Education (Primary) 4th year in-service student-teachers and their views on the use of a portfolio to enhance authentic assessment in the teaching of a course named EPS 403 on International Organizations and Governance in the Department of Primary Education at the University of Botswana for the academic year 2013/14 and 2014/15 respectively. The study adopted a particularistic case study design and used content analysis to understand the student teachers' views and ideas on the use of a course portfolio as an assessment tool. A total of 150 students' portfolios that were developed by a group of in-service student-teachers with a specialization in social studies education formed the population for this study. Purposive sampling was used to select the documents for analysis. The sample comprised of 74 students' portfolios. Data were analysed inductively and corroborated using descriptive statistical techniques through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 23. The findings of the study indicated that participants attach value to the use of a portfolio as an assessment tool and perceive it as a worthwhile exercise as it greatly encourages students to develop critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration as well as developing academic and social skills. The conclusion drawn from these findings is that the use of a portfolio is viable for in-service teacher development as it promotes a conducive learning environment devoid of competition. The study recommends a paradigm shift for social studies educators to consider the use of a portfolio as an assessment tool for in-service teacher development in combination with tests and examinations that are predominantly accorded a higher status at the University of Botswana.

Key Words: Authentic assessment, Portfolio, Performance Assessment, Self-Assessment.

Introduction

"This course has helped me to transform some of my attitudes which were hitherto not consistent with social studies education. Although I am not entirely satisfied with my level of participation in class discussions, I have profoundly increased participation in group activities. Gone are the days where I used to approach the course in a sloppier manner to a point of wanting to learn more. My attitude to education has developed for the better, in fact, I have of late applied for MEd. Social Studies on part-time basis because I feel I have so much potential to excel and develop professionally" (Student; 2014/15 Cohort).

The above quote, in particular, sets the tone for this paper as posits the students' position, mood and feelings regarding their experiences in a Social Studies course known as EPS 403 whose main aim was to transform students' learning through high quality pedagogical experiences. It is through high quality education that the country's human resource can produce a sustainable economy and move towards social development. For education to be of high quality it should continuously strive to undertake rigorous pedagogical stances and assessment procedures.

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This implies that any education system has to undergo a process referred as reforms in educational assessment. Erwin (1991) defines educational assessment as a process of defining, selecting, designing, collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development. Educational assessment, therefore, implies a process of documenting, usually in measurable terms, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that students have to experience during their educational journey. Educational assessment "seeks to determine how well students are learning and is an integral part of the quest for improved education. It provides feedback to students, educators, parents, policy makers, and the public about the effectiveness of educational services" (Pellegrino, Chudowsky & Glaser; 2001, p.1). This suggests that for educators to know if learners have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs, a form of assessment has to be conducted.

Student assessment has long been considered as one of the key issues in education as it assists educators to know if students learn what they are being taught. Student assessment has several purposes which include: improving students' learning, stimulating and encouraging good work by students, communicating the teacher's judgment of the students' progress and informs the teacher about what students have and have not learned. Assessment is essential not only to guide the development of individual students but also to monitor and continuously improve the quality of programs, inform prospective students and their parents, and provide evidence of accountability to those who are involved in the process (Gardiner, 1994). Student assessment provides crucial information on how well students are learning and how to improve students' learning. Student assessment can be based on writing assignments, group presentations, portfolios, examinations or project work.

Recent research shows that student assessment is undergoing profound changes as reforms in educational goals and content, standards, curriculum and instruction, teacher education, and the relationships among parents and schools take place (Bond, 1995). Institutions are now mandated to develop assessment practices that will minimize the uncertainty and subjectivity associated with assessing student competence. One of such student assessment practice is authentic assessment. The type of authentic assessment that is gaining ground is where students are required to perform a task on their own and become actively involved in the learning process. In other developed countries such as the Netherlands and New Zealand assessment usually takes the form of an integrated portfolio (Monyatsi, 2013). In Botswana schools, the use of portfolio as an assessment tool has been used in practical subjects such as Design and Technology, Commerce, and Art, craft and design. The University of Botswana pre-service teaching practicum has also changed from the traditional classroom observation to portfolio based assessment (Monyatsi, 2013). The multi-million *pula* questions is; if one unit of the University of Botswana was able to change the students' assessment practices, what prevents other units to follow suit?

This study comes in the wake of criticisms leveled against social studies classrooms and pedagogy as being authoritarian and didactic (Tabulawa, 2003; Mhlauli & Muchado, 2013). Teachers' have also lamented that social studies is a difficult subject to teach as it is content-laden and requires a lot of reading and information for one to be able to teach with confidence. Teachers also complained that the subject matter for social studies was difficult and very scarce to get. Furthermore, student- teachers felt it was boring and uninteresting as it calls for knowledge regurgitation with no active involvement of the learners in the learning process (Mhlauli, 2010). As a result student-teachers shy away from taking social studies as an area of specialization since it is difficult for them. The purpose of this study was, therefore, to explore the student teachers' experiences in using a portfolio as an assessment tool in a social studies course on international organizations and governance (EPS 403) designed for in-service teachers in the department of primary education at the University of Botswana in an effort to transform its teaching, learning and assessment and see as to whether it would yield better results and interest.

This study was guided by the following Research Questions (RQ's) generated from the students' reflections on the use of a portfolio:

Research Questions

1. What are the student-teachers ideas and views about the use of a portfolio in social studies?
2. How does the use of a portfolio improve (if any) students' pedagogical content knowledge in social studies?
3. What challenges do students encounter in the use of a portfolio in social studies?
4. What recommendations are necessary to enhance the use of a portfolio in social studies?

Conceptual Framework

This study used a conceptual framework as articulated in Handley *et. al* (2007) contextual and temporal aspects of assessment/feedback methods. The contextual and temporal aspects of assessment/feedback methods emphasise on a realistic portfolio assessment where there is interaction between learners and instructors during assessment. This is two-fold, where the lecturer writes an assignment and where students create their own assignments.

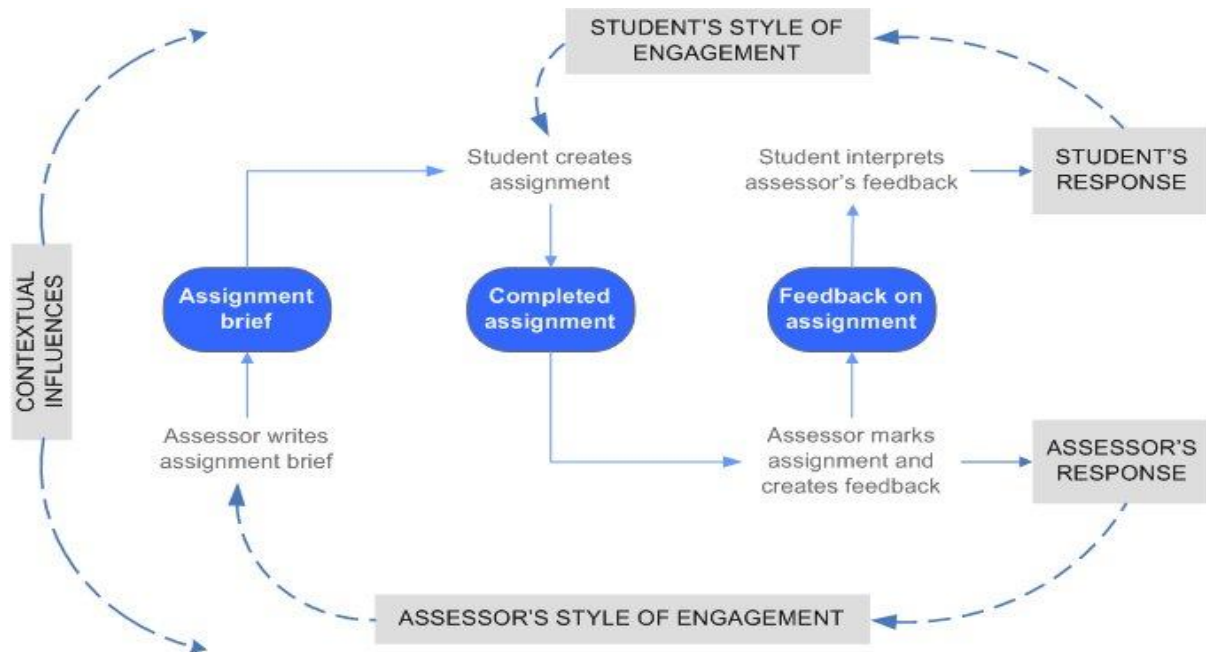


Figure 3: Contextual and temporal aspects of assessment/feedback methods (Handley et al., 2007:6)

In a case where the lecturer writes assignments, before assigning learners some work, a number of contextual factors influence the relevance of assignments to be written. The contextual factors may include the objectives and purposes of the subject or course, institutional policies; learners' socio-cultural norms and academic discourses (Handley et al., 2007). It is then that the lecturer would write an assignment with the assumption that the content will be understood by the learners. The learners would be given an opportunity to complete the assignment and wait for the lecturer's feedback. In a learner's lead assessment, they think of a topic and document it. The work would be submitted to the lecturer to mark and give feedback. For both scenarios learners and lecturers respond on the assignment either in the form of satisfaction, confusion, increase in self-efficacy and disillusionment (Handley et al., 2007) and having a clear understanding of what contributes to the student's poor or good performance.

In the Botswana context, both cases of student assessment apply. The teacher led assessment is common in schools while the student led is evident in tertiary institutions. In tertiary institutions students assume an active role in the assessment process. At their level students are expected to evaluate their own abilities in the real-world. The students are expected to be creative; expose their analytical skills; have a sense of collaboration as well as cherishing their written and oral expression skills. All these attributes are documented using authentic tasks and projects to show case their talents and skills. Authentic tasks and projects are compiled and presented as a portfolio. There is a shift from the traditional rote learning and memorisation of what has been taught for purposes of passing a test or examination. A portfolio is assessed and graded based on how the student understands the principles of the academic discipline. This process of assessment is authentic because students learn and practice how to apply important knowledge and skills for authentic purposes (Wiggins, 1993). Even though the authentic assessment paradigm has not reached other academic disciplines, in this technological era where there is blended e-learning and smart classrooms, portfolio assessment should be enforced to engage students' intellectual abilities. Students are motivated if they see and realise that their documented work is appreciated.

Literature Review

Educational assessment is crucial for assisting learners learn and is an integral part of the quest for improved education (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001). Through good and continuous assessment learners can gain insight into their learning and understanding of knowledge, skills and attitudes that teachers impart. It is expected that assessment should provide information about the levels of understanding that students are reaching (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 1999). Huba & Freed (2000) emphasize that assessment should develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. Teachers assess student learning through varied procedures such as structured and informal observations, projects, tests, presentations, performances and exhibitions, audio and videotapes, experiments, portfolios, and journals. It is highly recommended by some scholars that today's student assessment should be authentic (Mueller, 2014; Palm, 2008).

Authentic assessment is any technique which can be used by teachers, instructors, educators and lecturers in order to assess students' professional and personal growth. It is a shift from the traditional way of assessing students' knowledge, skills and attitudes by using tests, examination and experiments. Mueller (2014) describes authentic assessment as a form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills. Palm (2008) affirms that in authentic assessment students should construct knowledge. The cognitive work that has to be applied is disciplined inquiry. Students should engage in the use of prior knowledge to get beyond that knowledge, establish relationships between pieces of this knowledge to construct in-depth understanding around a reasonably focused topic, and conduct their work and express their conclusions through elaborate communication. This suggest that authentic assessment encourages students develop analytical skills; have the ability to integrate what is learnt; to be creative; be able to work collaboratively; and develop written and oral expression skills (Palm, 2008).

Types of Authentic Assessment

There are several types of authentic assessment which include; performance assessment, portfolio assessment, self-assessment, face-to-face interviews, writing articles, story retelling, demonstrations, projects/presentations and observations. The most commonly used authentic assessments are performance assessment, portfolio assessment and self-assessment (Mueller, 2014; Palm, 2008). Authentic assessments have many potential benefits to students, teachers and parents. These benefits include:

- Students assume active role in the assessment process.
- Authentic assessment can be successfully used with students of varying cultural backgrounds, learning and academic abilities.
- Tasks used in authentic assessment are interesting and reflective of students' daily lives.
- Ultimately a more positive attitude toward school and learning may evolve.
- Authentic assessment promotes a more student-centred approach to teaching.
- Teachers assume a larger role in the assessment process than in the traditional testing programmes.
- Authentic assessment provides valuable information to the teacher on the student progress as well as the success of instruction.
- Authentic assessment is helpful for special needs students because it incorporates social and behavioural skills necessary both in and outside the classroom.
- Parents will more readily understand authentic assessment than the abstract percentiles, grade equivalents, and other measures of standardised tests (Hart, 1994; Elsworth, 2014; Sonkushre, 2012).

Student Portfolio

Students' portfolios are referred to as collections of student work and performance. The contents may include student's self-evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of their work. A student portfolio as is described is "a systematic collection of student work and related material that depicts a student's activities, accomplishments, and achievements in one or more school subjects" (Venn, 2000, p. 530). In Botswana schools students' portfolios are commonly used in the practical subjects where students show-case their artefacts and artistic achievements.

Students are encouraged to create folders containing a student's impression and favoured work. World-wide more teachers favour the use of portfolios in all academic disciplines (Venn, 2000; Mueller, 2014). The assumption is that student portfolios are useful as a support to the new instructional approaches that emphasize the student's role in constructing knowledge and understanding and the teacher's role in promoting students' learning. The use of a student portfolio in assessment enhances lecturer and students' involvement in evaluation. It is assumed that student portfolio assessment enhances motivation, assists lecturers with decision making, and is effective for reporting accomplishments and progress to parents (Elsworth, 2014; Mueller, 2014; Sonkushre, 2012).

The Importance of Student Portfolio assessment

Research has shown that students benefit from portfolios as they reveal the students' talents and skills. As students take part in the development of their portfolios, analysing the criteria for what constitutes good work, and learning to evaluate their own work through guided reflective practices, students grow and develop in their knowledge and understandings (Venn, 2000; Elsworth, 2014). Venn (2000) outlines some of advantages of student portfolios which include:

- Promoting student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking.
- Measuring performance based on genuine samples of student work.
- Providing flexibility in measuring how students accomplish their learning goals.
- Enabling teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress toward meeting those goals.
- Giving students the opportunity to have extensive input into the learning process.
- Facilitating cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing.
- Providing opportunities for students and teachers to discuss learning goals and the progress toward those goals in structured and unstructured conferences.
- Enabling measurement of multiple dimensions of student progress by including different types of data and materials.

The main advantage of a student portfolio assessment is to promote a dialogue between the lecturer and students about their work. Students are given an opportunity to discuss their work and encouraged to set goals regarding what has been accomplished and what needs to be done in future to sustain their achievements. Mueller (2014) suggests that students' portfolios often tell compelling stories of the growth of the students' talents and showcase their skills through a collection of authentic performances. In any process of creating portfolios students are taught and encouraged to perform authentic tasks which show application of acquired knowledge and skills. Fernsten & Fernsten (2005) contend that portfolio assessment provide an authentic way of demonstrating skills and accomplishments and also encourages a real world experience that demands organization, decision making, and Meta cognition. This suggests that any portfolio assessment would be deemed authentic as students reflect on their work, engage in self-assessment and goal-setting.

Methodology

The study was qualitative and used the particularistic case study design. Particularistic case studies focus on a particular situation, phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group. A case study design can be used to study a phenomenon systematically (Merriam, 1988). A case study design is emergent, therefore, the research changes as the evaluator gains new insights into the concerns and issues being studied (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996) This design was chosen because it was intended to shed light on a phenomenon that was of interest to the researcher which involved understanding how the students perceive the use of a portfolio in social studies, this feedback is crucial to the lecturer. The study employed content analysis for its research method. Content analysis is said to focus on analysis and interpretation of recorded material such as public records, textbooks, letters, films tapes diaries, themes and reports in its own context (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorenson, 2006). In the case of this research, the documents that were studied were course/student portfolios that were developed by in-service student-teachers doing a Bachelor of Education degree (BEd) in primary education who were taking EPS 403 (International Organizations and Governance) as a core course.

This method of research was chosen primarily because of the nature of questions asked such as “what can be learned about a phenomenon by studying the documents?” (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorenson, 2006). The use of documents was chosen because they are said to be unobtrusive and rich in the portrayal of the values and beliefs of the participants in the setting (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Through studying these documents, the researchers were able to better understand ways in which students perceived the use of a portfolio in social studies education as well as the context, content, methods of instruction and expectations in the classroom. The portfolios that were developed by the students provided data for this study.

Research Context

The course EPS 403 is a social studies course that is taken by students at fourth year level during their final year. This course is a 3 hours/credits course per week and is offered in one semester. In this course students are assessed through Continuous Assessment (CA) and a Final Examination at the ratio of 1:1. Throughout this course, students were given 1 assignment and 1 test which would constitute CA and an Examination at the end of the semester. Since 2013/2014 academic year, as part of the CA a portfolio was introduced as a way of improving knowledge acquisition and simplifying the course content for the students. In this course, students are required to develop a course portfolio as one of their assignments contributing towards their continuous assessment. In this portfolio, they are expected to keep a journal and document all activities taking place during the class and outside class. At the beginning of the portfolio, students were to outline their expectations and prior knowledge on the course. Students are exposed to a variety of teaching methods among them; blended e-learning, independent research, group activities, power-point presentations, lectures, blackboard discussions, analysis of video materials and class discussions.

During the mid-term break, students are expected to consult with the course lecturer on the progress of their work, and assess themselves on what they have done so far. The lecturer will discuss with them individually on their progress and provide feedback on what they need to do to improve their work. Upon completion of the portfolio at the end of the lectures, students are required to reflect on their experiences in developing a portfolio in terms of knowledge gained, expectations being met, challenges and recommendations on the course. These reflections then formed the basis for data to be used to find out if the use of a portfolio was beneficial to them or not and areas that needed improvement. It is such activities that would inform our teacher education practices and assist us to develop quality teachers that are relevant for the 21st century education.

Population

A total of 150 portfolios were used which were developed by 4th year in-service student teachers with a specialization in social studies taking the course on International Organizations and Governance (EPS 403) in two subsequent academic years (2013/14 and 2014/2015 respectively). These portfolios were developed as course assignments where students documented their activities daily through keeping a journal and developing a portfolio in the process.

Sample

The sample was purposively selected through randomly picking a total of 74 portfolios of which 44 were from the 2013/14 cohort and another 30 were from the 2014/15 cohort. The students' portfolios were classified into three categories according to **Excellent**, **Very Good** and **Good**. The categorization according to grades was done to insure that there is a balance in the number portfolios analysed which would be reflective of the total population. This gave a total of 74 portfolios that were examined for data collection in this study. This sample was convenient to the researchers as it allowed them to get a clearer picture of what the students' views and ideas were regarding the use of a portfolio in social studies lessons in view of the fact that they perceived the course to be difficult as it required a lot of reading and knowledge of current events and affairs locally, regionally and internationally.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data were analysed through inductive analysis where data were coded through identification of codes that were related to the research questions. The codes were then categorised and thematically arranged to give meaning to the data.

For triangulation purposes, the coded data were further analysed through the use of Statistical Package of Social Sciences Version 23 (SPSS) to augment the qualitative analysis. Data were then presented descriptively with the aid of tables, graphs and charts.

Findings and Discussions

The findings from this study have shown that students are overwhelmingly in favour of the use of a portfolio in the teaching and learning of social studies even though it has its own challenges. The students see the use of a portfolio as key to the development of a variety of skills, pedagogies and knowledge acquisition as they embark on a variety of activities. These findings are in tandem with the assertion that student portfolios are useful as a support to the new instructional approaches that emphasize the student's role in constructing knowledge and understanding and the teacher's role in promoting students' learning (Venn, 2000; Mueller, 2014). From these findings it can be argued that students' performance also improved with the use of a portfolio as it enabled them to document all lessons and resources used during the course which also acted as revision throughout the course leading to the final examination. These findings are discussed according to the themes that were generated from the research questions which are: development of skills, knowledge acquisition, improvement of pedagogical content knowledge, and challenges in developing a portfolio.

Theme1: Views about the use of a portfolio in social studies?

These themes that emerged from Research Question (RQ) 1 are discussed under the following sub-headings as articulated in the students portfolios; development of skills and knowledge acquisition.

Development of Skills

The student viewed the use of a portfolio as beneficial to them as it helped them in developing a variety of skills such as research, critical thinking, IT skills as well as collaborative, analytical, communication, interpersonal skills, application of multiple perspectives and knowledge acquisition on global issues and relations. In all the 74 portfolios examined, students indicated that they were able to acquire and develop a variety of skills that they will be able to apply at their work place and in this case their classrooms. Research skills were also learned as they were able to search for information individually and developing a log and journal where they were able to keep track of their activities throughout the semester. Figure 1 below shows how students articulated the skills that they learned through the use of a portfolio. This figure indicates that all the students stated that they acquired a variety of skills in this course (EPS 403) and were appreciative of the way the assessment was structured.

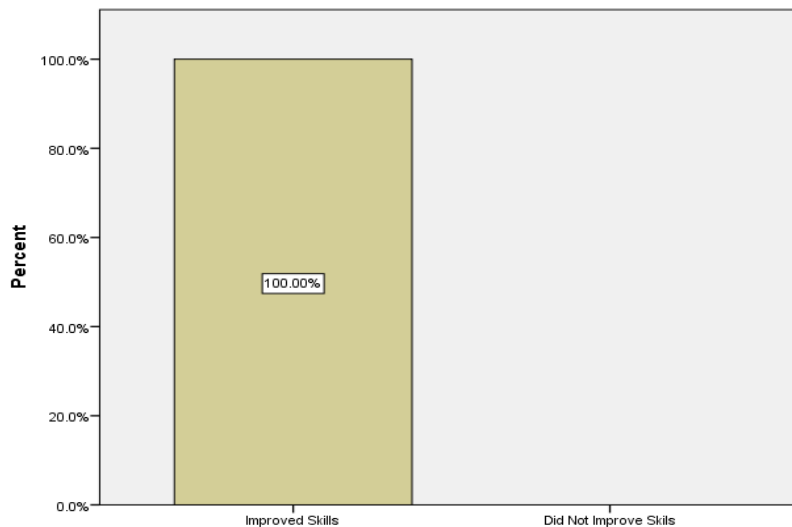


Figure 1: Students Improvement of Skills

Students further indicated that they learned a lot of skills as indicated by one of the Students who wrote in her reflection page that:

"I developed critical thinking, analytic skills (especially public speaking and ability to read critically) achieved through group discussions and presentations. I did not only develop knowledge and skills but also some values such as tolerance, cooperation and trust were realised."

The sentiments of this student were shared by the majority of students who felt that the way assessment was structured forced them to work hard in order to meet the lecturers' and course expectations. They also felt that the skills they learned through the use of a portfolio were important for future use as articulated by another student who mentioned that:

"These skills I believe are pre-requisites for today's challenging and unpredictable life."

These students' reflections are a clear testimony of what they learned throughout the course which was necessitated by the form of assessment that the lecturer used which is a departure from the norm where students make presentations, assignments and tests without having to document their journey throughout the course. Research has shown that students benefit from portfolios as they reveal the students' talents and skills. As students take part in the development of their portfolios, analysing the criteria for what constitutes good work, and learning to evaluate their own work through guided reflective practices, students grow and develop in their knowledge and understandings (Hamp-Lyons & Congdon, 2000). Therefore, these findings resonate well with research where it is stated that one of the advantages of portfolio assessment is that it promotes student self-evaluation, reflection, and critical thinking as well as facilitating cooperative learning activities, including peer evaluation and tutoring, cooperative learning groups, and peer conferencing (Venn, 2000), hence developing a myriad of skills among learners.

Development of IT Skills

Students further showed the extent to which the use of a portfolio generated interest and equipped them with IT skills. One student stated in his portfolio that:

"... My technological prowess has even surpassed expectations since I am more capable of confidently applying my ICT skills in downloading videos, saving data on flash disks and CD ROM. Above all I have developed my personal website, blog and forum for scholarly discussions with colleagues online."

Another student mentioned that:

"Apart from content knowledge gained, I really have acquired several skills such as computer knowledge... Computer knowledge was acquired through blackboard discussions, class presentations as we were expected to write and present power point presentations, and compilations of presentations. Also different skills of computers were acquired through the compilation of this portfolio as it called for looking for information from a variety of resources including the internet where most of the information was sourced."

The ability of students who for years have proved to be technologically challenged as they were seriously technophobic and resisted to use a computer to learn to be able to use a computer for a variety of activities was an eye opener for the lecturer in terms of the power of a portfolio to enhance authentic assessment. The students' assertions attest to Mueller (2014) suggestion that students' portfolios often tell compelling stories of the growth of the students' talents and showcase their skills through a collection of authentic performances. Figure 2 below shows the magnitude of students who basically alluded to the notion that their IT skills were improved through developing a portfolio for EPS 403.

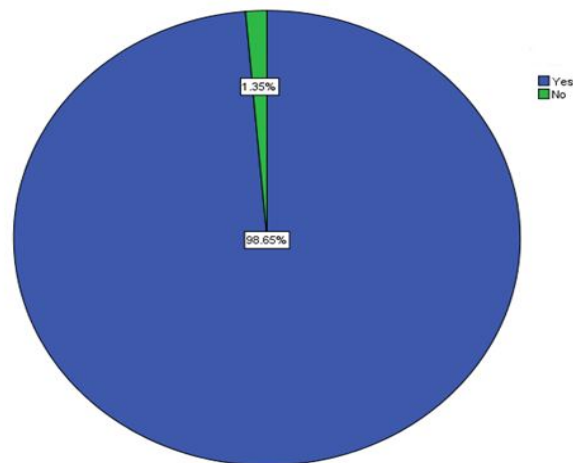


Figure 2: Development of IT skills

Figure 2 above clearly shows that 99% of the students stated that the use of a portfolio in this course assisted them in the development of IT skills through the use of blackboard discussions, chats, internet, downloading videos and using the computer to compile their work while only 1% did not write anything about the use of a computer. It also facilitated their interest in the use of the computer which enabled them to develop into the 21st century teachers.

Knowledge Gained during the Course

Almost all the students stated that through developing a course portfolio they were able to gain more knowledge on global governance. This helped them change their perspectives on the course as they used to think that the course was too difficult for them. The portfolio development enabled them to continuously keep on task through reading various materials for class discussions and group presentations. These tasks needed them to read every day as they kept a log and a journal of all activities that they embarked on during lessons and after class which assisted them in gaining confidence in handling content on international organizations as stated by one student in her portfolio that:

"...the knowledge gained will be used at the field of work and will be shared with other teachers. The project will also help the writer handle with confidence topics in the upper primary syllabus such as objective 5.4.1.7 which says "explain the roles of economic organizations in Africa".

Through this portfolio students were able to gather and use information, improve their interest in current affairs as well as analyse content for further understanding. Students further mentioned that the knowledge gained in the course enhanced their capacity to critique and analyse information as they read various materials provided for the course. Figure 3 below clearly shows the students' responses to their acquisition of knowledge and their ability to analyse the content of the course.

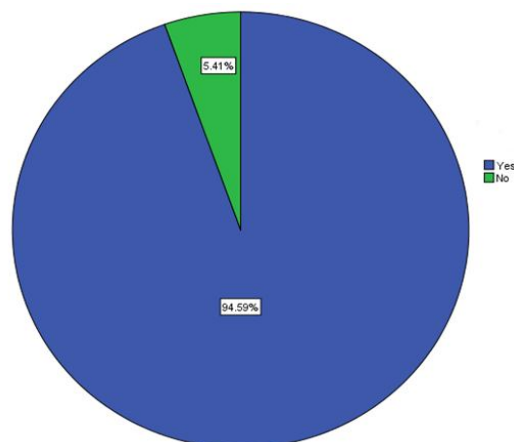


Figure 3: Critical Analysis of Content

The statistics in figure 3 support the students position on knowledge gained in the course as indicated in the student portfolio that:

"I have learnt so much from the course. It really gave me a breakthrough to a lot of things. Therefore, it is of great importance to appreciate that more has been learnt from this course. Through the articles, videos and class presentations...all these increased my scope and knowledge of social studies content hence improved professional growth in terms of delivery".

From these anecdotes from the students 'portfolios, it is evident that the use of portfolios though demanding, was appreciated by the students as they reflect on what they have done. Another student wrote that:

" This portfolio project helped me grasp the course content such that I don't even have to read for the final exam as everything I have learned in the course is still vivid on my mind".

The use of a portfolio is seen by students in this course as a gateway to freedom of knowledge acquisition as it developed their potential in terms of learning how to use information for their teaching as well. These findings are in support of scholars who contend that portfolio assessments provide an authentic way of demonstrating skills and accomplishments and also encourage a real world experience that demands organization, decision making, and met cognition (Fernsten & Fernsten, 2005).

Theme 2: Improvement of student pedagogical content knowledge

Through the course, students alluded to the fact that the course exposed them to a variety of pedagogical styles. Students stated in their portfolios that the teaching methods that were predominantly used throughout the course included discussions, group presentations, video discussion, blackboard discussions, individual research, class lectures and debates. Figure 4 below shows the extent to which the students felt that various methods were used during the semester in EPS 403.

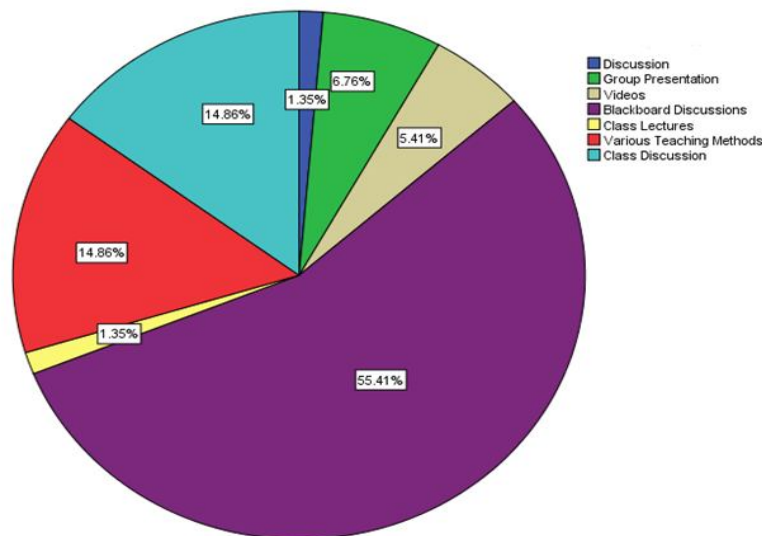


Figure 4: Teaching Methods Used

Students also indicated that the methods used in the teaching of this course in the form of videos, discussions, debates, presentations and blackboard discussions gave them the opportunity to learn first-hand on how to teach social studies and motivated them to make the teaching of social studies interesting as they were exposed to a variety of resources in the process. As indicated in one of the portfolios the students observed that:

" Teachers that use high quality, appropriate resources in an effective way enhance the social studies programme for students. Students should have access to information and ideas via a range of materials. Resources used in this course enabled us to reinforce, challenge and expand existing knowledge and skills from a range of views and perspectives".

These anecdotes are indicative of the students reflections on methods and resources used in the course that in turn would influence how they teach in future. These findings are in tandem with Darling-Hammond (2006) assertion that the uses of productive strategies are becoming increasingly crucial for the improvement and survival of teacher education. The ideas about the teachers' pedagogical stances influencing their decisions on how they approach their teaching are well captured in these students' portfolios.

Theme 3: Challenges in the use of a Portfolio in Social Studies

Students mentioned that during the process of developing a portfolio they encountered a number of challenges which revolved around technophobia, cumbersome research, self-assessment, journaling, and group discussions. Students felt that they had challenges in the use of a computer to access videos and other materials posted on blackboard as they had phobia of technology. However, they ended up learning how to use a computer because of the portfolio. It became crucial for everyone to work as an individual because no one was willing to work for another, hence individualized work was accomplished.

Blackboard discussions also required students to sit behind the computer and contribute to the discussion thread posted by the lecturer; as a result every student was forced to learn how to participate on the discussion board with the lecturer focusing and refocusing the discussion throughout the lesson. They also felt that the use of a portfolio required a lot of research which was cumbersome for them, but in the end they appreciated the research as it kept them informed about the content of the course. The journaling of the events in the course was challenging as it required students to keep track of what was happening in class. Self-assessment and peer assessment were difficult for them as they tended to be biased. When self-assessment was used students tended to shy away from being critical about themselves and where peer assessment was used students would revenge on those that they had a grudge on. They also indicated that group discussions were very difficult in that some students were not contributing to the discussion or not participating effectively hence making collaborative work a nightmare.

Theme 4: Students' recommendations on the use of a portfolio

The majority of students felt that the use of a portfolio should be used in EPS 403 and be extended to other courses in social studies that are both content and pedagogically inclined. Table 2 below shows that 83% of the students felt that the course should be recommended to other students outside the social studies concentration while only 17% felt that it should not be extended to the other students.

Table2: Students' Recommendations of the Portfolio

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	59	78.7	83.1	83.1
	No	12	16.0	16.9	100.0
	Total	71	94.7	100.0	
Neutral		3	5.3		
Total		74	100.0		

Almost all the students felt that the course should be made a core for all students in primary education since it will inform them about global issues and current events which are important for every teacher to know and understand.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The use of a portfolio in EPS 403 provided a "teachable moment" for the students as they in turn shifted their ideas of resistance in the development a portfolio to a situation where in the end they appreciated having gone through the whole process. The development of a portfolio further enhanced class attendance as each student needed to document what transpired during the lesson as perceived by them. Participation also improved as those who could not speak in class were able to weigh-in their thoughts in the online discussion board. A well-structured portfolio may provide a platform for a systematic inquiry into teaching and lead instructors to very important insights about their teaching and its effect on student learning. Through this course, we learned a lot about students as we saw the use of a portfolio as having a great potential in influencing scholarly discourse about teaching that can foster a systematic and focused discussion on significant problems and issues that make up the content of social studies.

Portfolios are important as they can serve not only as an assessment tool but rather as a source of pedagogical content knowledge and can be used as a reference point for teachers in future as they can inform their teaching and learning to advance the practice of teaching. These portfolios were pivotal in that they have the potential to help students plan their own academic pathways as they come to understand what they know and are able to do and what they still need to learn as shown by some students who were inspired by this course to apply for M Ed Social Studies and Early Childhood Education while they were still doing their B Ed. This was confirmed by one student who said:

My attitude to education has developed for the better, in fact, I have of late applied for M Ed. Social Studies on part-time basis because I feel I have so much potential to excel and develop professionally"

From the excerpt above, it is clear that students were challenged and motivated by developing a portfolio to the extent they discovered their potential and what they need in life hence the idea of pursuing a higher degree.

The following recommendations are made:

1. The use of a portfolio as an assessment and pedagogical tool should be extended to other courses in the social studies specialization especially at year 3 and 4.
2. Students need to be trained on the importance of self-assessment and peer-assessment for their development as practicing teachers.
3. More emphasis should be put on blended e-learning as a way to enhance teaching and learning.
4. Alternative assessment techniques which are authentic need to be emphasised in teacher education in order to for them to influence their peers pedagogies and practices in primary schools.

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