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A Reflection on the Use of ePortfolios in Business Studies Programmes

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Abstract

Business studies focusing mainly on the financial field are typically complex and require up-to-date information to enable a proper understanding of the economic and financial environment. Professionals in this field must overcome many challenges and meet many demands in order to do their job efficiently. They are expected to have excellent judgment and knowledge of a variety of disciplines so as to be efficient and proficient in making decisions. Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must therefore offer programmes that are continually updated and in touch with the demands and realities of this field. Learners need to be equipped with skills that enable them to face real-life situations and make informed decisions. Researchers and practitioners in the business field report that students tend to struggle with specialist finance subjects and need extra support in the classroom. To help students overcome these barriers, ePortfolios were selected as the best support tool for this study due to their close association with lifelong learning and the development of critical thinking skills, and their role in recording formal and informal learning processes and thus creating a useful inventory of students' learning. This paper explores the use of ePortfolios to promote collaboration, reflection, self-regulated learning and critical thinking skills among students on business studies courses. The paper is supported by a formal reflection on the authors' own experience and assessment of using this tool to support postgraduate students in

their learning process. The study contributes by providing a detailed reflection on how instructors can implement ePortfolios in any discipline, highlighting areas that need careful attention to ensure that the experience brings value to students and instructors alike.

Keywords: collaboration, critical thinking, ePortfolios, self-regulated learning

Introduction

Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005) define an ePortfolio as “a digitized collection of artefacts including demonstrations, resources, and accomplishments that represent an individual, a group or an institution” (p. 2), and ePortfolios also provide evidence of learning accomplished over time (Scottish Qualification Authority, 2012; Montes, 2013; NCCA, 2013). To help set the paper in the appropriate pedagogical context, it is important to understand what a portfolio is and how practitioner-based researchers have incorporated it into their practice. Thus, a portfolio can be considered as an important learning tool for students, as it facilitates the collection of work, efforts and accomplishments over the academic year, and at the same time it encourages reflective practices on students’ progress, largely by providing a detailed picture of how their work has evolved over time (Barrett, 2004, 2007). Students should therefore be encouraged to use learning portfolios as a way of sharing their knowledge with their peers and also to provide evidence of their engagement with the course material that they can present to their instructors to aid the assessment process. In this way, instructors can maintain contact with their students’ work and offer personalised and quality feedback that helps their students to assess their own learning and motivate them to produce high quality work that meets their course requirements and personal expectations.

Early research on the value of portfolios as a learning tool argued that a portfolio is simply “a means of communicating about student growth and development” and “not a form of assessment” (Stiggins 1994, p. 87). However, the uses of portfolios have evolved substantially since this definition was published. The authors of the present paper consider their own experiences of using ePortfolios and also review recent developments in the field on the value of this tool for supporting and nurturing students’ learning. According to recent research (Abd-Wahab, Che-Ani, Johar, Ismail & Abd-Razak, 2016; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Hughes, 2008), the use of ePortfolios in the classroom plays a central role in teaching and learning approaches for the following reasons: they give instructors the opportunity to both assess and provide quality feedback to students; they foster students’ self-reflection; and they contribute to the development of autonomous and creative learning. Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005) and O’Keeffe and Donnelly (2013) provide evidence that ePortfolios have the potential to enhance teaching, learning and assessment practices as well as the feedback process due to their versatility and flexibility. Instructors can use ePortfolios to offer their students support in areas such as career preparation, and with their colleagues to develop and share teaching philosophies and encourage self-reflective assessment of their own work. ePortfolios also appear to support students’ academic progress and consolidation of knowledge (Abd-Wahab et al., 2016; Ring & Ramirez, 2012; Hughes, 2008). It is therefore relevant to consider how assessment can be effectively integrated while using ePortfolios as a teaching and learning tool. In what follows, relevant aspects of the research process and their association with the assessment practice are outlined in an attempt to contextualise the study. But first, some general thoughts on the research context and rationale are presented.

Research Context and Rationale

The main focus of this paper is to offer a formal reflection based on the authors' considerable experience of using ePortfolios to support postgraduates in their progression towards a self-regulated approach to learning. ePortfolios were used to support students' learning experiences because they allowed instructors to encourage and help their students to collect quality evidence of their work throughout the academic year. Students can benefit from developing their personal ePortfolios as a platform on which to showcase their work to interested parties and to identify and highlight their achievements, development, and overall progress throughout their courses (Stiggins, 1994; Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005). The authors have developed a discussion and analysis sustained by more than seven years of experience using ePortfolios to support their learning and teaching practice, and particularly to enlighten their personal student-centred learning and teaching philosophy. The paper also offers some general thoughts based on the researchers' experience of using the tool to support postgraduate finance students that contribute to add evidence to the existing body of knowledge. The authors identified a clear gap in the literature on ePortfolios, namely, their use to support business studies, and in particular studies focusing on the financial field. The discussions are presented in such a way as to help instructors – from business studies or other disciplines – who are considering incorporating ePortfolios into their learning and teaching strategies. In addition, the study helped identify some general recommendations for using the tool, together with some areas of concern, the impact of which can be minimised or whenever possible, avoided altogether. The paper therefore makes a contribution to the field by offering a detailed reflection on the use of ePortfolios based on the authors' own experiences that are grounded in research into the value of ePortfolios to the students' learning process.

According to Laborda, Musselin and Teixeira (2014), the concept of technology-supported assessment is gaining importance, and it is evident that HEIs need to seriously consider using

information and communication technology (ICT) to develop formative and summative assessment. In the specific case of business schools, this is a matter of major importance. If they aim to be competitive and at the same time offer quality learning experiences, the role of ICT needs to be well thought out. Thus, a tool like the ePortfolio could start making a difference in the student learning process.

Literature Review

This section presents an overview of the research on the role of ePortfolios in the learning and teaching process. The section is structured around three main areas: first, the value of assessment for learning and the role that ePortfolios can play in this process; second, the value of assessment, the importance of the feedback process and how ePortfolios can help educators to develop their own learning and teaching paradigm; and finally, practices that encourage self-regulated learning in the classroom and the value of ePortfolios to help students take ownership of their own learning method. The discussions throughout the section are supported by a general reflection on the authors' practice of using ePortfolios in their own learning and teaching paradigm, allowing for the presentation of a critical assessment and reflection of the resources reviewed.

One initial aspect to consider when thinking about classroom strategies to foster students' learning is the value of close monitoring and coaching to ensure students make progress and their work improves. To offer appropriate mentoring, coaching and guidance to students, the authors argue that some form of assessment must take place, otherwise students cannot contextualise their progress and improve the integrity of their work. However, not all kinds of assessment are appropriate, and assessment for learning needs to be carefully considered to

help minimise potential negative connotations that could be associated with students' understanding and perceptions of instructors' assessments. A second issue to consider is how an ePortfolio allows students to keep track of their coursework over the academic year, as a record of their progress that helps them to grow and develop, and facilitates the instructor's task of monitoring students' work. A third point to consider is the specific role of the instructor in monitoring and offering quality feedback, specifically in terms of motivating students. If students' work is not closely and properly assessed, they will inevitably not value the work they put into developing their ePortfolios and the whole effort would go unrecognised. And fourthly, if ePortfolios are not used as a vehicle for formation and engagement between the student and the instructor, there will be serious concerns about the students' ability to adequately progress and evolve as self-regulated learners. The authors believe that the negative connotations associated with being 'assessed' may be precisely what prevent students from developing and being creative in their work, and this is an issue that instructors need to address. Additionally, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must ensure that students' basic skills are developing and being consolidated by fostering the appropriate use of technology in the classroom. Instructors in third level institutions should monitor their students' progress to ensure that they receive enough support in this process. Thus, some form of assessment is obviously required to allow instructors and students to identify the progress in coursework. To this end, portfolios – and in particular electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) – could be the most appropriate tool. Keeping track of a student's work allows the instructor to give constructive criticism both individually and collectively. Through their own academic practice and engagement with learning and teaching pedagogies, the authors have identified ePortfolios as a valuable tool for guiding and mentoring students efficiently and continuously. Experience shows that assessment for learning is necessary to bring students and instructors together and exchange views that lead towards a more constructive

and satisfactory learning process. At the same time, instructors are able to reflect on the student's work, and provide comprehensive feedback that helps them move forward in their learning. For this purpose, the ePortfolio could be successfully integrated as a teaching and learning tool, and should not simply be regarded as a superficial platform on which to record and file work. In sum, ePortfolios can be used to assess students' work in order to encourage and enhance further learning and self-discipline, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, when considering assessment as part of the learning process, it is important to understand the notion of assessment for learning, which adds value to the students' learning experience.

Assessment for Learning

The authors' vision of integrating ePortfolios in business studies aligns with Black and William's (1998) considerations on assessment for learning purposes. These authors provide evidence that "formative assessment is an essential component of the classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement" (p. 139), which they believe is a more effective strategy than others. Financial disciplines challenge learners in many ways since they require, i) economic and financial knowledge, ii) strong mathematical and statistical foundations, iii) the ability to manage, organise and filter substantial volumes of information, iv) effective communication skills, v) cooperation, collaboration, and the ability to work on one's own initiative, vi) decision-making skills, vii) sound IT skills, and viii) analytical and problem-solving skills, to name just a few. It is therefore essential to monitor and assess whether learners are developing the required skills. In this context, assessment for learning is considered as an effective means of supporting the student learning experience. As the Assessment Reform Group (2002) highlights: "[a]ssessment for Learning is the process of seeking and interpreting evidence for use by learners and their teachers to decide where the learners are in their learning, where they need to go and how best to get there" (p. 2). In other

words, instructors should monitor students' work and progress properly, and ongoing assessment is necessary to allow them to identify their strengths and weaknesses through feedback and reflection. The main goal is to help students with their learning and to guide them in improving specific areas so as to advance in their studies and acquire the skills they will need to join the labour market. Therefore, continuous assessment is crucial to this learning process, as the complexity of financial disciplines demands a great deal of effort from instructors and students alike. Today's economic and financial climate is increasingly uncertain. It is a highly competitive field, which means professionals are expected to handle substantial volumes of information and make quick and well-informed decisions; they are therefore under intense pressure to offer the right set of skills to potential employers. According to Davies, Arbuckle and Bonneau (2004), "[a]ssessment for learning is ongoing, and requires deep involvement on the part of the learner in clarifying outcomes, monitoring ongoing learning, collecting evidence and presenting evidence of learning to others" (p. 1). Therefore, assessment is advantageous for learning and business schools should be equipped with the right set of tools for instructors to support their students, giving them the best opportunity to acquire the skills that financial employers have identified as essential. The ePortfolio can add value to the learning experience by contributing to an assessment process that prioritises learning as its main objective. The authors' own experiences in integrating ePortfolios into their learning and teaching strategy have enabled them to identify the main challenges that students and instructors face during this process. To identify the core stages of the learning process, the authors have developed a circular flow (presented and discussed later). The ultimate goal of this circular flow is to help learners become disciplined and self-regulated, so that they can take control of their own learning (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002).

The Value of Continuous Assessment

The following analysis gives a general overview of how ePortfolios have supported the authors' teaching and learning paradigm and how their use of the tool has changed over the past seven years as they feed back in their students' experiences and their own learning outcomes as instructors. In their initial quest to improve students' assimilation and consolidation of knowledge in financial disciplines, the authors explored the role of continuous assessment in the classroom, particularly in terms of how technology could be used to this end. The main research findings show that continuous assessment is a key component in the learning process, but only when it is supported with quality feedback. Feedback needs to be personalised and offered in a timely fashion in order to make students aware of the areas in their work that require attention and improvement. At the same time, continuous assessment allows instructors to gain a clear picture of their students' progress and identify areas that require extra effort. In this way, continuous assessment helps forge a connection between instructors and students in the classroom: students can also formulate questions and thus use their time effectively to receive focused guidance in support of their personal learning process. Moreover, instructors can identify the particular areas that require extra support and design appropriate strategies that help their students grow as disciplined and self-regulated learners.

Promoting Self-Regulated Learning in the Classroom

Figure 1 illustrates the process the authors follow to promote disciplined and self-regulated learning. Self-regulated learners can be defined as "individuals that approach educational tasks with confidence, diligence, and resourcefulness. [...] Self-regulated learners are aware when they know a fact or possess a skill and when they do not. [...] self-regulated learners proactively seek out information when needed and take the necessary steps to master it"

(Zimmerman 1990, p. 4). Further, Gardner argued that “the ultimate goal of the education system is to shift to the individual the burden of pursuing his own education” (1963, p. 21). According to Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Pintrich (2000, p. 453), “[s]elf-regulated learning is an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior, guided and constrained by their goals and the contextual features of the environment”. Consequently, self-regulated learning can be promoted by the ePortfolio platform, which can be customised to aid continuous assessment in the classroom. Using ePortfolios challenges students to take an active role in the knowledge-generating process and minimises levels of passivity that undermine their ability to recognise and assess their own learning progress (Soler-Domínguez, Morales & Tarkovska, 2013). The ultimate goal of the authors’ teaching strategy is therefore to allow students to take responsibility for their learning and encourage them to work in an autonomous and self-regulated manner. Assessment and feedback are regarded as core tools that engender discipline and self-regulation in students’ learning, as through the assessment process students remain connected with their instructor who should be able to guide and coach them as they mature as responsible and autonomous learners.

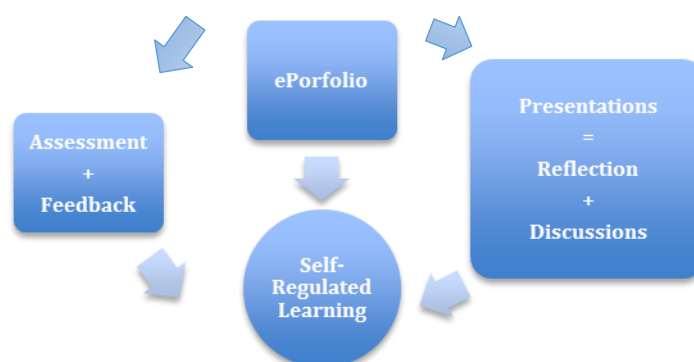


Figure 1: Self-regulated Learning Cycle

To help students become self-regulated learners, the instructor’s learning and teaching strategy must be supported by effective assessment schemes, designed to provide

personalised, continuous feedback for students. In this regard, the ePortfolio has great potential for integrating coursework with updated assessments, and gives students the opportunity to communicate with others about their work through class presentations. Being able to share and discuss their work in the classroom encourages students to reflect and open up discussions that can enrich their learning and allow them to develop and consolidate their skills.

Integrating ePortfolios in the Classroom

The ePortfolio helps instructors monitor students' work and generate dynamic communication in the classroom. It facilitates and encourages students to present their work and thus share their progress with their instructor and peers. As a result, students can learn from their peers and reflect on the work and effort that they and others have put into their personal ePortfolios. The process leads to reflection and animated discussion among students, where they can focus their attention on economic and financial issues and receive feedback from their colleagues. This feedback helps them to improve and gain different perspectives on their work, as well as facilitating the evaluation of their own work in a much richer context that also contemplates their peers' efforts as they progress together with their learning.

In their research on integrating ePortfolios in the classroom, Morales, Tarkovska and Soler-Domínguez (2012) identified five main stages (see Figure 2) of implementation. The process was initially conceived as a unidirectional circular flow that evolves over five different stages. Stage one is fundamental in that it conditions the whole process, and is when direct support and early feedback must be given to students. The instructor's role is also crucial at

this stage, as it determines the success of the whole exercise. Prior to implementing the ePortfolio in the classroom, the instructor must reflect on the kind of work he or she expects from learners and how this could be facilitated. If the main goal is to encourage self-discipline and self-regulated learning in the classroom – as in the authors’ case – it is necessary to design a way of promoting this type of learning among students. Thus, assessment of students’ work must be combined with feedback that supports this progression before any other activity can be considered.

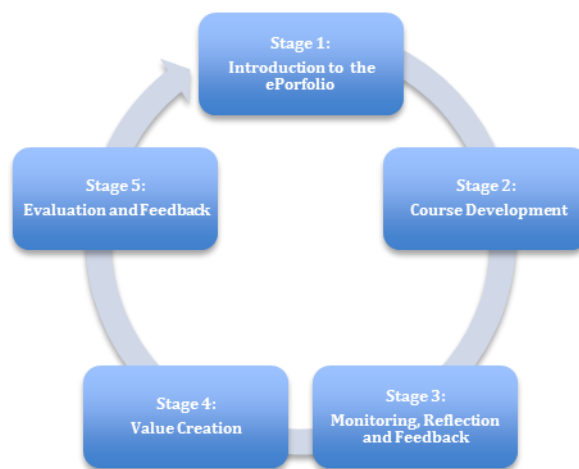


Figure 2: ePortfolio Implementation Stages (Morales, Tarkovska & Soler-Domínguez, 2012)

Morales, Tarkovska and Soler-Domínguez (2012) argue that ePortfolios in the classroom encourage students to become more disciplined and self-regulated learners, since their use as a form of assessment helps to enhance students’ autonomy and self-discipline in the learning process. These authors also point out that the implementation stage (Stage 1: Introduction) is crucial for maximising the benefits the tool can offer to instructors and students alike. In other words, guidance must be provided in a clear and organised manner so that students can understand how the ePortfolio will add value to their course learning objectives and help them to accomplish their personal learning requirements. The initial stages of this process (introduction and development) are fundamental for the overall success of courses using

ePortfolios. The authors also found that instructors play a vital role in convincing students of the ePortfolio's usefulness. At this early stage the instructor can offer guidance on how to adapt to the new tool and make the initial connection between the course curriculum and the ePortfolio. Once students' initial fears are dispelled and they can engage with their coursework, several factors can influence their learning (Stages 3 to 5). The general benefit for students is that they become more aware of their learning processes, while remaining autonomous as they continue with their own work.

Reviewing the Integration of ePortfolios in the Classroom

After approximately seven years of experience using the ePortfolio, together with feedback from students and colleagues, the authors further developed the circular flow on the implementation of ePortfolios in the learning process as depicted in Figure 2. Particular areas of interest are those concerning information and detail on the stages required to implement the ePortfolio in the classroom. The detailed review of existing research on ePortfolios appears to focus on the value of ePortfolios for teachers (Whitworth, Deering, Hardy & Jones, 2011; Hubert & Lewis, 2014; Winberg & Pallitt, 2016); the field of health care learning (Peacock, Murray, Scott & Kelly, 2011; Chan, 2012; Perks & Lou Galantino, 2013); distance learning (Josephsen, 2012); and pedagogical areas that do not seem to consider the specific needs of business disciplines – in particular financial studies – and the steps to follow to familiarise students with the tool. The authors' own experience of using ePortfolios, together with the recognition of a clear gap in research on their use in the financial disciplines, led to the development of this model (Figure 3) to incorporate extra support for instructors on the key points to take into account when using an ePortfolio to support students' learning. While it is clear that ePortfolios are beneficial in terms of fostering class dynamics through their potential to integrate new activities, it is essential to ensure that

instructors are fully prepared to deal with issues that arise in the classroom. Instructors should develop teaching strategies that give them the confidence to successfully and efficiently integrate ePortfolios into their learning and teaching philosophies. Figure 3 evolves from the initial circular flow, from which the main stages of integrating the ePortfolio process are retained. However, additional areas have been identified, together with new elements that instructors should consider when deciding whether to use ePortfolios with their classes.

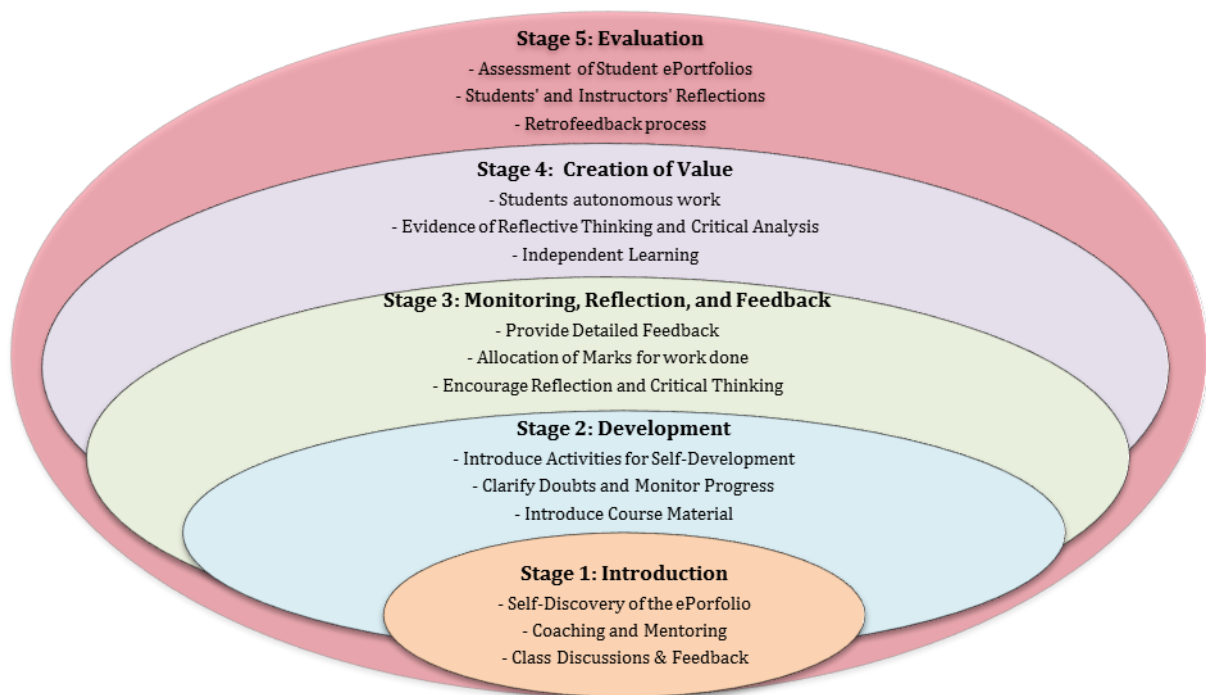


Figure 3: Evolved ePortfolio Implementation Stages

The first stage of the process, *Stage 1*, is crucial to the whole process. Instructors must have sufficient knowledge about the tool to be able to coach their students appropriately. They are advised to develop their own ePortfolios as part of their learning process; becoming familiar with the tool in this way will make it easier for them to introduce it to their students.

Instructors should be able to hold class discussions and offer feedback to students with live presentations in which they demonstrate how to use the tool. They should provide the basic details during the introductory sessions and then allow students to explore the tool and ask questions. This stage is fundamental and requires considerable monitoring and time to deal

with technical issues. At this stage the instructor is advised to focus only on the use of the tool, leaving the core learning requirements until later; academic aspects of the course should not be introduced until students are sufficiently comfortable using the ePortfolio. In *Stage 2*, the development phase, the instructor monitors the students' progress closely. The main emphasis should be on providing support to students to ensure that they are fully at ease with the tool and understand how they can use it to support their learning. The instructor should now introduce the course material and students should be encouraged to start using the ePortfolio to regulate their course learning. At this stage of the implementation process instructors are advised to introduce class assignments and activities with clear guidelines outlining what they expect from the work done in the ePortfolio. Once more, monitoring the students' activities and offering objective and constructive feedback should be central to the class work to facilitate students' progress. Instructors should then be able to move towards *Stage 3* with confidence, where a more formal approach is introduced and by which time students should be more independent in their work. The main objective of the whole process is now focused on the monitoring, reflection, and feedback stage to allow students to see how their work is progressing. Attention should focus on the course curriculum so instructors can offer quality feedback that helps students reflect on their work and at the same time, encourage them to improve and further develop their learning and understanding of the subject matter. At this stage students should be taking ownership of their own learning and identifying how their work is progressing and what type of changes are needed to help them comply with the module's basic learning requirements. Students should begin to demonstrate that they are self-regulated learners and instructors are encouraged to start grading the students' work to ensure they understand the standards they need to meet and the tasks they have to carry out.

Instructors could introduce class presentations to allow students to share their work through class discussions. This should also be considered as part of the course assessment. At this point, students and instructors should be ready to move towards *Stage 4* where students work autonomously and demonstrate clear signs of reflective and critical thinking. The instructor's role therefore becomes less important, as students are increasingly able to work on their own. Evidence of independent learning should be found in their ePortfolio work. The instructor's role is now that of an observer and a provider of feedback and assessment. Finally, in *Stage 5* instructors should assess and evaluate their students' work, provide them with comprehensive feedback and encourage bilateral feedback that consolidates the learning experience. At this stage, instructors are encouraged to engage in constructive discussions with other colleagues, which will help them improve their own understanding and implementation of ePortfolios in their classrooms.

A SWOT analysis of ePortfolios

The current literature on the use of ePortfolios as an educational tool emphasises their potential to introduce dynamic forms of assessment into a student-centred classroom (Mason, Pegler & Weller, 2004; Klenowski, Askew & Carnell, 2006; Heinrich, Bhattacharya & Rayudu, 2007). Figure 4 presents a general overview of the main issues the authors identified when developing their learning and teaching approach using ePortfolios. The context of the SWOT analysis is specific to the authors' diverse and relatively long experience with the tool. Over the years, the authors have gathered a substantial amount of information from their own students' interactions with the tool. Observation techniques and interactions with students through the feedback process have allowed the authors to identify the core issues, presented in Figure 4. The ePortfolios' flexibility and variety of resources make them a valuable tool for students on business studies courses where finance is prioritised. Students

are able to structure and monitor their learning, and keep track of how it progresses, which can be reviewed as frequently as required. ePortfolios empower students to take control over their learning, as well as encouraging them to collaborate and participate in class discussions, where they can share knowledge and good practices. These activities offer a break from traditional classroom dynamics and shift the focus of attention onto the student. Through their experiences and exposure to the tool, the authors have identified the general stages that appear to dominate the learning experience with ePortfolios, as presented in Figures 3 and 4. Nevertheless, each group is different and there is no standard approach for every class or every instructor. The analysis is therefore developed from a generic approach that offers some pertinent ideas on the core issues instructors might consider should they wish to use ePortfolios in their classroom. In this regard, the stages presented and the issues outlined in the SWOT analysis are recognised as general areas that instructors from any discipline can reflect on when exploring the use and value of ePortfolios to their learning and teaching approaches. Instructors can then adjust the stages according to their students' needs and their own requirements. In this respect, becoming familiar with the tool and taking enough time to consider the course requirements and student needs is considered to be fundamental to the whole process. The SWOT analysis reported below is a progressive process that instructors can use to exploit the ePortfolio's strengths and opportunities, bearing in mind that its potential weaknesses can be overcome if identified and worked through as the coursework progresses.



Figure 4: ePortfolio SWOT Analysis

The main purpose of the SWOT analysis is to offer some points arising from the authors' own experiences of using ePortfolios that they hope will help instructors assess the tool and become aware of some basic issues that they need to consider if they decided to try it.

Main Challenges of ePortfolio Implementation Process

The authors' experience of ePortfolios in postgraduate-level courses in finance indicates that the introduction period (see Stage 1 in Figures 2 and 3) is the stage on which the success of the whole process hinges. A common situation they identified relates to students' lack of understanding on why they should be developing an ePortfolio. They seem to have difficulty recognising the value of an ePortfolio in their learning process and experience and spend a great deal of time questioning why they should devote their attention, time and effort to developing an ePortfolio. It is not unusual to encounter students who are struggling to consolidate the basic concepts of their course curriculum. Some students argue that class

work should focus on issues related to finance rather than extra activities that are not directly connected to the field. In such circumstances, if the instructor is not able to clearly convey his or her message on how the ePortfolio is intrinsically connected to their coursework, the main learning objectives and final goals, and how the ePortfolio can support their learning experience, students will inevitably be reluctant to work with ePortfolios and will be confused about the course aims and objectives. Therefore, integrating ePortfolios into the classroom requires meticulous planning, following clear guidelines so instructors can convince students of their benefits. Instructors should emphasise the ePortfolio's main contributions to the course learning objectives and be able to link them clearly to the syllabus and basic requirements. It is important to emphasise the importance of students' taking ownership of their learning and that embracing this tool should be a fundamental part of their coursework. This will not be an easy task if instructors have no clear teaching and learning strategy, and if they are not able to clearly explain the course objectives and requirements to their students and in particular the role the ePortfolio plays in them from the very outset. Furthermore, these problems will increase if instructors have limited knowledge on ePortfolios, as they will not be able to offer appropriate support and guidance to their students.

Conclusions and Recommendations

ePortfolios are an additional tool that can contribute to enhance and further develop students' learning experiences if properly integrated into the classroom. They offer support to instructors interested in facilitating continuous self-discipline and self-regulated learning. This tool can be used to enrich the learning process and to promote an environment of collaboration and critical inquiry. Students using the tool can share and reflect on their work, and simultaneously benefit from receiving guidance and personalised, constructive feedback

(Barrett, 2007). The use of ePortfolios helps students develop an understanding of their own learning and enables them to decide on how they wish to progress. The proper use of technology offers myriad opportunities that can encourage and develop students' sense of independence and deep learning (Barrett, 2005; Zimmerman, 2008). Nevertheless, the integration of ePortfolios should revolve around the idea of students working to meet their course objectives, while gaining in-depth knowledge in areas of particular interest.

ePortfolios have much potential, but to ensure that they are properly integrated into the classroom and assimilated by students, the role of the instructor is fundamental (Barrett, 2007). The instructor is central in conveying course information and the associated learning goals. In line with Barrett (2007); Soler-Domínguez, Morales and Tarkovska (2013); Mason, Pegler and Weller (2004) and Klenowski, Askew and Carnell (2006), the development of an electronic portfolio offers alternatives for learning, where students are the main focus of attention, and technology can help achieve excellent standards. But in order to succeed and ensure that students benefit from integrating ePortfolios in their coursework, instructors need to have a clear learning and teaching strategy where the ePortfolio is properly placed and its role thoroughly explained to their students. Further research in the field should focus on analysing students' progress after using ePortfolios. In particular, the value of ePortfolios when interacting with future employers should be considered to understand whether the tool helps to showcase students' work and contribute to making a difference in the final selection of applicants for a job.

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