



The Impact of Guidance and Assessment on Portfolio Assignments in Albanian High Schools

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Abstract

A student's portfolio consists of various assignments used as an evaluation method to reflect their achievement and learning outcomes as required in each subject. This research aims to present the situation regarding portfolio assignments and the assessment methodology offered by the pedagogical staff by analyzing students' perceptions and identifying the outcome and the validity of this grading system. It reviews how the educational institutions compiled and structured this grading system, comparing them to similar practices and formats in other countries and creating a general understanding of the aimed outcome and the actual situation. This study is centered on (i) Describing students' high school perception of the importance and relevance of the portfolio assignments in Albania, (ii) identifying the importance of clear structure and guidelines in the writing templates assigned to them: purpose, content, and benefits, (iii) Identifying the guidelines and instructions provided to teachers at high schools in Albania and analyzing their sufficiency in the teaching and evaluation process. This research used a quantitative approach by analyzing a sample of 374 online questionnaires delivered to students of private and public high schools in five major cities in Albania through Google Forms within eight months, from October 2022 to May 2023. The outcome showed that students had a significant absence of guidance on the portfolio assessment framework, adding the element of academic misconduct. It revealed a considerable lack of competence in composing original written works and a failure to attribute sources correctly.

Keywords: *portfolio assignments, assessment, writing, templates*

1. Introduction

Teachers use countless assessment methodologies to understand better pupils'/students' progress throughout an academic year. Typically, tests and quizzes have maintained dominance since education systems have taken the form we know and acknowledge nowadays. When compiling assessment criteria for evaluating their student's performance, teachers have been exposed to using portfolios, another genuine assessment form. A portfolio assessment is a comprehensive evaluation of a student's work, which includes a collection of their best pieces, reflections on their learning, and evidence of their progress over time. Experts suggest that for teachers to know and measure the development of skills such as critical thinking or problem-solving, communication, and collaboration, there is no better approach than the evidence collected in the portfolios. When evaluating a student's performance, it is crucial that the portfolio assessment covers all aspects of their abilities and conforms to the objectives of the course. By doing so, educators can gain insights into various dimensions of student learning rather than solely assessing their end products [1].

2. Literature Review

Bardhyl Musai, a scholar from Albania, has analyzed and emphasized the significance of portfolios and project-based assignments. According to him, project-based learning, a pedagogical approach that involves students in the active and collaborative learning of real-world problems and challenges, is a concept that has been introduced previously and was introduced by John Dewey in the early 20th century. Dewey's idea of 'learning by doing' made him one of the early advocates of project-based education. Over time, educational research has expanded this concept into a 'project-based learning' methodology. Some scholars also associate project-based learning with Jean Piaget's 'situational learning' perspective and constructivist theories [2]. Educators in countries outside of the United States have shown interest and concern regarding the impact of traditional assessment programs on instruction and learning. They have started exploring how the results of performance-



based assessments can be utilized to meet the informational requirements of administrators, parents, teachers, and students [3]. Project-based teaching introduces a novel approach to active learning that nurtures collaboration and continuous student research. This interactive, participatory learning model holds significant promise for educators and students, fostering a deeper understanding of the subject matter and promoting the development of essential skills [4]. Portfolio assignments aim to improve writing skills, and a significant effect ($p < 0.01$) was observed on writing skills. Students who participated in portfolio assessments improved their writing abilities [5]. The Ministry of Education in Albania has been instrumental in championing project-based learning. It has issued two essential instructions, Instruction nr. 34 dt. 11/09/2015 and Instruction nr. 17 dt. 05/07/2022, based on article 48 of the law nr.69 dt. 21/06/2012 for 'Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania.' These instructions have introduced a new assessment and evaluation pattern, emphasizing the importance of project-based learning in the educational landscape. This institutional support underscores the credibility and effectiveness of project-based learning as a teaching methodology. Instruction nr. 34 dt. 11/09/2015 on the Evaluation of Pupils [6, 7]:

Table 1:

Evaluating the learning process	Weight in percentage grades IV-V	Weight in percentage grades VI-XII
Continuous Evaluation	45%	40%
Test Evaluation	30%	40%
Evaluation through pupils' portfolios	25%	20%

Such an assessment and evaluation were intended for each student to write or present three different assignments per subject for each of the three terms divided into an academic year. Simple math would be for students/pupils with a minimum of 12 subjects x 3 assignments = 36 assignments per term; as it can be presumed, the amount of work can be insurmountable. After piloting such evaluation methods for nearly three academic years and the exhaustion they caused to the primary, elementary, and pre-university educational systems, the Ministry of Education adopted Instruction nr.17 dt. 05/07/2022. This instruction made a minor change to the grading system by labeling the third form of evaluation called 'Evaluation of the curricular project.' The 'Evaluation of the curricular project' is a portfolio assessment focusing on students' ability to apply their learning to real-world situations and their overall understanding of the course material. This change in the grading system reflects the Ministry's recognition of the importance of project-based learning and its commitment to promoting this teaching methodology in the educational landscape. The instruction provides crucial guidance on assessments and grading criteria for all high schools. The evaluation criteria for the grading system, article 8, on the Final Evaluation expressly provided that teachers should use this format while assessing their students' progress. The table below demonstrates the official distribution of weights to be used by every high school in Albania. However, the instructions lacked clear guidance on the format or structure needed.

Table 2:

Evaluating the learning process	Weight in percentage grades IV-V	Weight in percentage grades VI-XII
Continuous Evaluation	45%	40%
Test Evaluation	30%	40%
Evaluation of the curricular project	25%	20%

The main criteria teachers need to consider when facing high school students' portfolios involve many elements, such as progress reflection, authenticity, content mastery, and skills development. These criteria cover different aspects of the student's understanding of the course material, posing critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills. These elements are intended to be fulfilled through portfolio assignments; however, such an approach should always consider how and where it is applied in Albania. The education system has undergone many changes in the last 30 years. For instance, one of the challenges faced in implementing portfolio assessment in Albania is the high number of students in the classrooms, especially in the main cities, such as Tirana, Durrës, Fier, and Berat, where the average class size is 25+. This high student-to-teacher ratio can



make it difficult for teachers to provide individualized feedback and support, which are crucial for portfolio assessments and project-based learning success. As a result, if the parties involved in this process expected a positive outcome regarding the feedback incorporation for each assignment, it could sound unrealistic.

When evidence is evaluated, it offers feedback to both the assessor and the assessee. The portfolio's performance evidence analysis helps the assessor determine the success of the teaching or training and identify necessary changes for improvement [8]. The difficulties usually arise when dealing with portfolio assignments, which require considerable time to prepare and assist the students in the process, especially in the Albanian setting of classrooms in major cities, where the number of students is 25+ on average. Since these portfolio assignments must retain and compile their work outside the classroom setting, motivating students to work hard can be challenging. Portfolios offer an indirect method of assessment. They give teacher educators an impression of students' teaching competencies, but this impression is mediated and not directly obtained like observations [9].

This study is centered on

- (i) Describing students' high school perception of the importance and relevance of the portfolio assignments in Albania,
- (ii) Identifying the importance of clear structure and guidelines in the writing templates assigned to them: purpose, content, and benefits,
- (iii) Identify the guidelines and instructions provided to teachers at high schools in Albania and analyze their sufficiency in the teaching and evaluation process.

The hypotheses raised are:

- (i) Whether students see the portfolio assignments as busy work or repetitive, they are more likely to disengage from the learning process.
- (ii) Whether providing such structure or guidelines can lead to improved writing quality and increased efficiency and the absence of such structured guidelines can have detrimental outcomes
- (iii) If the guidelines and instructions provided to high school teachers in Albania were adequate, but the resources and facilities needed to be improved, the learning process would have a negative impact on students' academic performance.

3. Methodology

Over eight months, from October 2022 to May 2023, 374 online questionnaires were analyzed using quantitative methods. The questionnaires were distributed via Google Forms to high school students from private and public schools in five major cities of Albania. The questionnaire consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions. The research findings indicated that students needed more guidance on the portfolio assessment framework. As a result, academic misconduct was prevalent among them. Furthermore, the study revealed that students needed help to create original written works and adequately attribute sources.

4. Results and Analysis

The analysis utilized the SPSS method. Students from various high schools in five major cities in Albania once again confirmed the lack of guidance provided by Albanian institutions, demonstrating the 'freedom' students have in how these assignments should be written and presented. These three key issues brought up how such assessment methodology can bring adverse consequences if provided and offered insufficiently. As shown in the cross-tabulation Table 3, a significant number of the responders responded that they do not provide the source of the information used, which is the reverse aim of academic integrity; practically, these students are validated for presenting and introducing work such as material and images that are not theirs as original.



Table 3:

9. Do you include the source of information in the task portfolio? * 10. Do you include photos and different images in the task portfolio? Crosstabulation

Count

		10. Do you include photos and different images in the task portfolio?				Total
		a) a) Always	b) Almost always	c) c) Sometimes	d) f) Never	
9. Do you include the source of information in the task portfolio?	a) Always	6	0	2	0	8
	b) Frequently	39	32	7	1	79
	c) Sometimes	28	30	14	0	72
	d) Rarely	14	12	7	0	33
	e) Almost never	7	12	5	1	25
	f) Never	91	49	14	3	157
Total		185	135	49	5	374

The study's second aim is to examine the clarity of the structure and format of the instructions and guidance provided to the students. Based on the documents assessed and the students' responses, the guidance needs to be more explicit, as seen in Table 4. Rather than providing a clear and consistent learning pattern, 49% of the respondents were free to use the format they considered adequate, which observably caused their portfolios to be erratic with no regard to the format and no attribution to the sources used.

Table 4:

12. The writing format I use in portfolio tasks/assignments is

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid a) Standard determined by the teacher	86	23.0	23.0	23.0
b) Partially specified	41	11.0	11.0	34.0
c) Depending on the teacher	63	16.8	16.8	50.8
d) I am free to use the format that I consider suitable	184	49.2	49.2	100.0
Total	374	100.0	100.0	



Table 5:

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	64.161 ^a	20	.000
Likelihood Ratio	50.606	20	.000
N of Valid Cases	374		

The text presents the results of Chi-Square tests, showing statistically significant differences between expected and observed values. The tests yielded a Pearson Chi-Square value of 64.161 and a Likelihood Ratio value of 50.606, with 20 degrees of freedom and an asymptotic significance of 0.000. There were 374 valid cases analyzed, and a note mentioned that 12 cells (40.0%) had an expected count of less than 5, indicating potential reliability issues.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The article discusses various assessment methodologies teachers use to evaluate student progress, focusing on the significance of portfolio assessments and project-based learning. It also delves into the impact of traditional assessment programs on instruction and education and the effectiveness of project-based learning in nurturing collaboration and essential skills. Assessment through portfolio assignments is meant to introduce high school students to the first step of research and analysis, but if not adequately introduced, it can adversely teach them wrongdoings. In conclusion, the article summarizes the key findings from the literature review, emphasizing the importance of portfolio assessments and project-based learning in the educational landscape. It also discusses the implications of institutional support, such as the Ministry of Education's emphasis on project-based learning in the Republic of Albania and how it reflects a commitment to promoting effective teaching methodologies. Additionally, the conclusion highlights the need for continuous evaluation and improvement of assessment methods to ensure they align with the educational system's objectives.

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