

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER

ISSN-2321-7065

IJELLH

**International Journal of English Language,
Literature in Humanities**

Indexed, Peer Reviewed (Refereed), UGC Approved Journal



Volume 6, Issue 12, December 2018

www.ijellh.com

Zain Mohammad Sulaiman

(Research Scholar)

(Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, India,
zainsulaiman89@gmail.com)

Prof. Shabana Hameed

(Department of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, India,
shabanahameed@rediffmail.com)

Integrating ICT with Portfolio Assessment in Business English Classrooms: Investigating Teachers' and Students' Responses

Abstract: Portfolio Assessment is one of the tools of alternative assessment which encourages the process of self-learning and self-assessment. Alternative Assessment approaches are commonly practiced in English for Specific Purposes classes, especially Business English classrooms. Integration of ICT in teaching and assessment of Business English is much needed and practised at a broader scale. The paper investigates students' and teachers' attitude and perception towards integration of ICT in Business English classrooms for portfolio assessment.

Key-words: Business English, ICT, Portfolio Assessment

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Globalization has caused a paradigm shift in the area of English language teaching, from methods to post methods. Globalization has caused internationalisation due to increase in business across borders and cross-cultural communication. So, English has become the language of business, being lingua franca of the 21st century. With the increase in business and other sectors' specialization and super specialization has evolved a separate branch within English Language teaching, which is English for

Specific Purposes, truly domain-specific. Further, with the inclusion of ICT in language learning and teaching, doors have been opened for alternatives which include alternative teaching-learning as well as alternative assessments.

Here, it investigates the portfolio assessment in Business English classrooms by integrating ICT. Business English is domain-specific, used for business purposes including finance, marketing, insurance, IT and travel and tourism. Business English demands separate methodology to teach as compared to general English whose aim is content-based focussing on the functionality of the language. The assessment involved is portfolio assessment which is one of the tools of alternative assessment which is a constructivist approach. The learning and assessment are assisted by ICT enabled tools such as Web2.0, Moodle, Google docs, YouTube, webinars, etc. A portfolio is a collection of students' work which includes written samples as well as verbal communication is involved for assessing. The most important aspect of portfolio assessment is empowering student for self-learning and self-assessment. Feedback remains the most important key in alternative assessment where the assessment continuously takes place and immediate feedback is given to the students which makes them aware of their strengths and weaknesses. The attitude of teachers and students towards portfolio assessment is measured through a survey based on questionnaires distributed among them.

2.0 Portfolio: An Instrument of Alternative Assessment

A portfolio is one of the instruments of alternative assessment and indicates the deliberate, careful collection of learner production and reflective self-assessment which is employed to record progress and achievement over time. (Douglas, 2000:241)

Alternative Assessment is a constructivist approach of assessment, involving both the teacher and the student. In this approach, the teacher notes physical stance and expressions. Mind mapping, portfolios, checklists, investigating projects and activity-based tasks are often used to evaluate work in a constructivist frame (Badders,2000;

Constructivist Teaching Methods, n.d.) Many of the web2.0 tools are used for teaching and assessment.

Alternative assessment has been widely used in education, with much emphasis in language classrooms at tertiary level. Alternative Assessment is a substitute for assessing students work to the traditional mode of the pen-pencil test in language classrooms which motivates self-learning and self-assessment processes with the aim to develop creativity and critical thinking. It demonstrates both the weaknesses and strengths of the learners, while the traditional lacks in pointing out the strengths. Corrective feedback is the most essential part of the assessment, be it an initial, mid-term or final. It is a continuous assessment. Alternative assessment is known by its different names such as continuous assessment, peer and self- assessment, authentic assessment, holistic assessment and integrative assessment. (Cerghit: 2002)

Before introducing portfolio assessment, the definition of portfolio remains simple to complex. As per the available literature, portfolio may be defined as the collection of students' work over a period of time. Valeri-Gold et al. (1991/1992) defined portfolio assessment as a formative assessment where students become "active learners and questioning thinkers" (p. 298). Other authors provided a more descriptive explanation of portfolio assessment:

"A multidimensional system which provides teachers with a complete picture of a student's abilities and literacy development" (Harlin et al., 1992: 203)

Although K. Wolfs (1993) article did not specifically define portfolio assessment, it alluded to process that knowledgeable teachers engage in when they systematically observe and selectively document their students' performance through multiple methods, across diverse contexts, and over time as students participate in meaningful learning activities. (p. 519)

Valencia (1990) encompasses both portfolios and portfolio assessment:

“Samples of work that exemplify the depth and breadth of (students') expertise.... It resonates with our desire to capture and capitalize on the best each student has to offer; it encourages us to use many different ways to evaluate learning.” (Valencia: 1990)

2.1 Characteristics of portfolio assessment:

- a. Focus on developing self- evaluation/ assessment skills
- b. Teacher-student discussion over evaluations (where teachers can judge the student's progress.
- c. Teachers' responsibility for providing guidelines about the content of portfolio and scoring criteria
- d. More emphasis on students' reflection, rather than content
- e. A continuous process over a period of time

3.0 INTRODUCING BUSINESS ENGLISH

Business English Classrooms are the specialized language classrooms concerned with the teaching and learning of English used within Business domain, including finance, insurance, accounting and travel, and tourism. Business English comes under English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which comes under the area of English Language Teaching (ELT). English for Specific Purposes comes with a learner-centered approach to teaching English as an additional language, which focuses on developing communicative competence in a specific discipline such as academics, business, IT, and engineering. ESP courses differ from general English language courses and contain the following characteristics:

- a. Learners'-centric approach to meet the specific needs of the learners.
- b. Content-specific to a discipline-specific or occupation.
- c. Using authentic domain-specific documents and materials.
- d. Promote cultural awareness and improving intercultural competency.
- e. Deliver intermediate and advanced level language training.

(Evans & John: 1998)

Globalization has propelled the growth of international business with an aim 'all products and services for all'. English, being the lingua franca, has been the language of business. So domain-specific Business English is a fastest growing area within ESP because of the highest demand ever, but it is less researched.

“One major change has been the emergence of Business English as a major strand of ESP teaching. Early ESP work was dominated by English for Science and Technology. However, in the 1990s...the largest area of growth is Business English.” (Evans & John, 1998:31)

3.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF BUSINESS ENGLISH

- a. It is objective in nature rather than being subjective or personal (Ellis & Johnson, 1994:7)
- b. Experienced and pre experienced learners generally focus on functionality rather than in its linguistic characteristics
- c. Registers are defined by subject area and situation (Pickett, 1986a:8)
- d. The language is created by the process of poetics (Pickett, 1989:11)
- e. It is a domain-specific variety of English language.

Business English focuses on business phrases and the vocabulary used in a typical workplace. The teaching of Business English and General English differs at the level of contexts. So, the functions of Business English in classrooms and workplace differ at the level of practice and application. The key functions of Business English are:

- a. Business Writings include writing and responding to bulk emails, writing orders, "Thank You and complaint letters, negotiations, record keeping, brochures, etc.
- b. Listening- telephonic conversation mostly complaints
- c. Verbal Communication- through presentations regarding brand promotion, etc.

4.0 ICT ENABLED TOOLS IN BUSINESS ENGLISH CLASSROOMS: FOSTERING PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

ICT specifically refers to the computer-based technologies such as desktops, laptops, tablets, smartphones, software and Internet-based technologies including emails, websites, and social networking sites for the purpose of English teaching and learning (Davies & Hewer: 2009). It has been observed that teachers who adopt a socio-constructivist approach in language teaching tend to use technology in their classes more in order to optimize the students' learning potential, while teachers who merely use technology to enhance their curricula generally have teacher-directed instruction. (Hermans, Tondeur, van Braak, & Valcke, 2008).

The ICT enabled tools have made teaching-learning much easier than never before. It has revolutionized the education system. There is a number of ICT enabled tools which are commonly in use. The lists are as follows:

- a. Web2.0: Web2.0 is an enhanced version of Web1.0 which supports social networking sites which have sharing options. It includes audios, videos, articles, etc. As a social tool that provides numerous opportunities for language learners, the web fundamentally "decentralizes the role of the language classroom" (Thomas, 2009, p. 21). Specifically, the process of learning that conventionally takes place in-classroom has been replaced by the web, a student-owned territory that operates like a much larger, more engaging and more inclusive provider of power than a traditional classroom setting. This is evident in language learning as it is essentially a process in which a target language is often practiced and acquired within communities and group settings that are commonplace on the web.
- b. Blogs: Blogs are an open online platform where a learner and teacher can refer and can contribute the relevant contents. It is easily accessible online and free of cost. Few of Business English blogs are i) FluentU Business English Blog

(www.fluentu.com/blog/business-english/)ii) English With A Twist(www.englishwithatwist.com/blog/) iii) English for the Workplace (englishfortheworkplace.blogspot.com/p/other-blogs.html). These blogs help to improve business writings, business-specific vocabularies, phrases, and even verbal communications.

- c. YouTube: YouTube is also a social media site which is true for video sharing and viewing. The trainer/teacher or any distinguished scholar uploads his lecture videos and can be viewed by millions across the world. There are domain-specific channels too, just need to subscribe for viewing all the series.
- d. Webinars: Webinars are the latest trend particularly in language teaching where the lead educator delivers live lecture through a link sent via email. It is video and has an option to chat if any query. The recorded sessions are later available too. Cambridge English and Pearson Education regularly conducts webinars on language learning, teaching, and assessment.
- e. Google docs: This is used for survey purposes through emails with multiple choice questions as well as written responses too. It is convenient and can be sent in bulk.
- f. Moodle: Moodle is a global platform for LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) practitioners. It is run and supported by the global community. In India, eAbyas is the official Moodle partner. It can be browsed by language. It contains- documentation, course and content, books.

The above-mentioned tools are much practiced in language classrooms, from students to teachers takes help as it provides materials in abundance. These tools accelerate the process of self-learning and self-assessment among the students.

5.0 AIM

Aim of the paper is to investigate the responses of portfolio assessment in teaching-learning processes, its shortcomings and needs to motivate students towards

developing portfolio in order to enhance self-learning processes, developing skills for self-assessment and critical thinking in Business English Classrooms by using ICT enabled tools to reduce the phenomena of ‘digital divide’ in the process of globalisation.

6.0 OBJECTIVES OF PAPER

The objective of the paper is to develop the Portfolios for self-learning and self-assessment processes among students. ICT enabled tools will provide authentic and Business English materials for portfolios. The objectives of the paper also include Students’ performance and attitude towards Portfolio Assessment in Business English Classrooms.

7.0 METHODS

The present study is Participants based study for which a survey was conducted among 26 students (15 male and 11 female) of Masters in Business Administration (MBA) and 5 teachers at Faculty of Management Studies and Research, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India.

7.1 INSTRUMENT

The survey questionnaire, four-points on Likert scale was used in this research study. It was divided into ‘Questionnaire A’ and ‘Questionnaire B’ based on Four-points on Likert Scale which are Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Questionnaire A was Students’ Responses which intends to explore the effectiveness of portfolios by using ICT enabled tools in Business English Classrooms, developing critical thinking, self-learning and self-assessment skills in teaching-learning processes. (See Appendix)

Questionnaire B was Teachers’ Responses which intends to gauge students’ performance and attitude towards Portfolio Assessment in Business English Classrooms. (See Appendix)

Both the questionnaires contained six questions.

7.2 PROCEDURE

The survey questionnaire was distributed among the students after classroom observations, where the brief idea of portfolios was explained and accordingly the response came from the students and the teachers too responded based on their observation of the students' attitude and performance.

7.3 ETHICAL ISSUES

A declaration was given in the questionnaires by the surveyor that the data collected is truly for academic purposes. (See Appendix)

7.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data Analysis was done using MS-Word, entering data in chart format. Students' and Teachers' responses are analyzed separately.

Questionnaire A

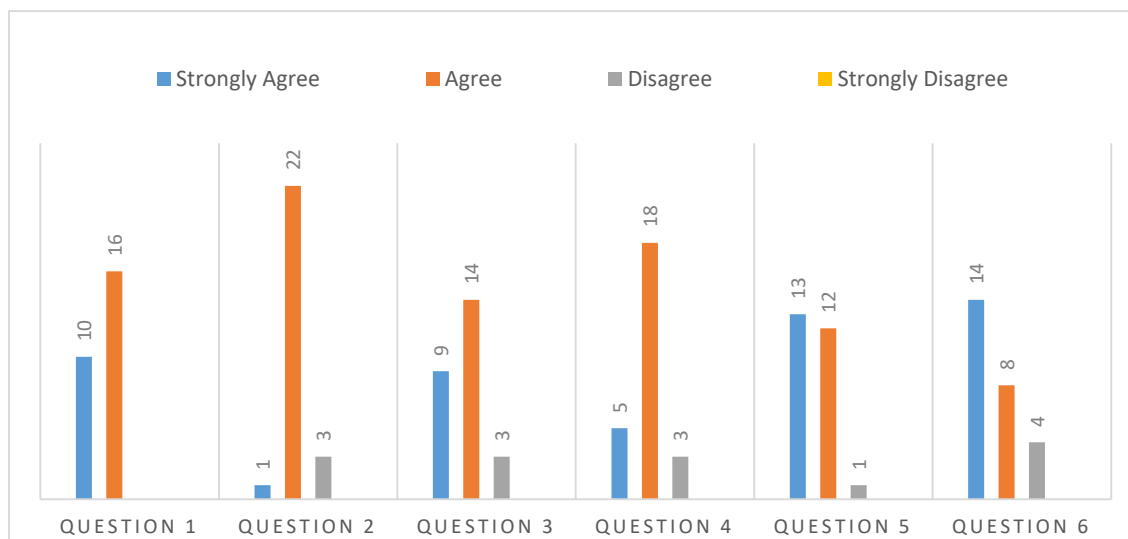


Table 1.1 Students' Response

Note: For questions refer Appendix

Questionnaire B

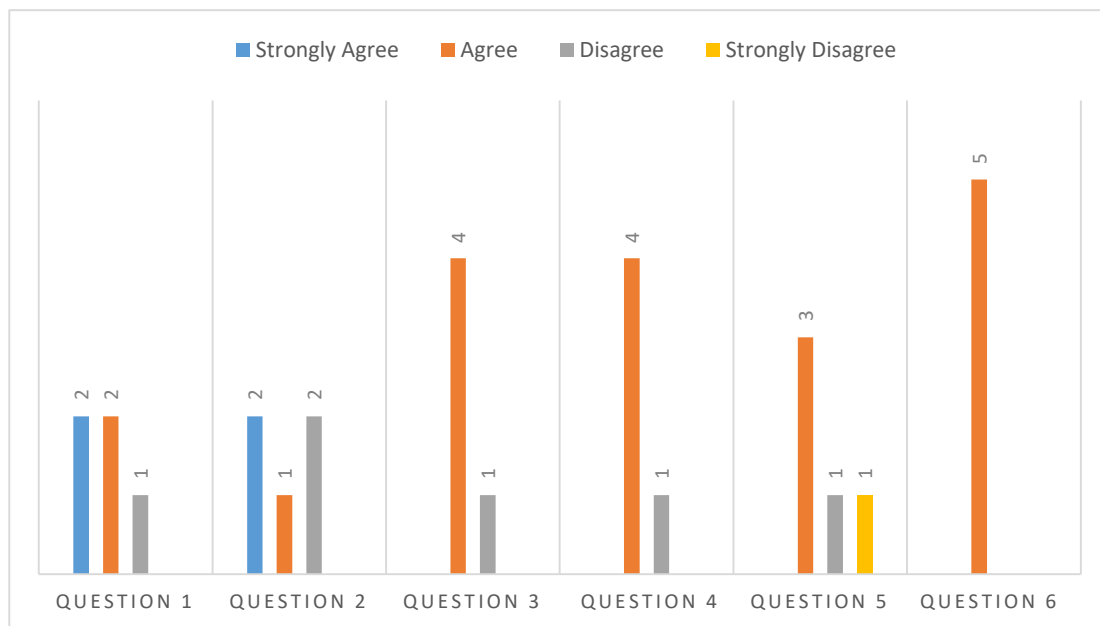


Table 1.2 Teachers' Response

Note: For questions refer Appendix

8.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

8.1 STUDENTS' RESPONSE: QUESTIONNAIRE A

Question number 1 deals with ICT's usefulness towards developing a portfolio. Out of 26 students, 10 strongly agree while 16 agree. This shows students are much exposed to the use of ICT enabled tools to enrich their learning processes. Students, all of them of aged between 20-25 years are taking digitalization as a reality and future of learning-assessment processes.

Question number 2-4 deals with ICT enabled tools such as web2.0, Google docs, YouTube, webinars, and blogs help to retrieve authentic materials, fetch business specific verbs, phrases, registers and genres along with suggestions in business writings

and readings. Out of 26 students, 1 student strongly agree for question number 2, 22 agree while 3 disagree. For Question number 3, 9 strongly agree 14 agree while 3 disagree and for Question number 4, 5 strongly agree, 18 agree and 3 disagree. This reveals that out of 26 students 23 are technically sound and responding to make use of digital resources in their education. 3 of them were aware of digital resources but not much responsive just because of 'digital divide'. A digital-divide is a phenomenon in which a group of population for whom the information technology is still inaccessible or scarce so they are not much exposed to its use.

Most of the students seem to be computer savvy. They are making optimum utilization of information technology for their educational purposes, particularly for language learning purposes. They have the potentiality to retrieve authentic materials for Business English, to fetch business-specific verbs, phrases, registers and genres for enhancing their business communication skills, both written and verbal forms to perform well at the future workplace. They are adaptive to use of ICT enabled tools like web2.0 which enable users to create, share, collaborate and communicate their work with others, without any need of any web design or publishing skills, Google docs are very common among students for survey purpose which is conducted online. YouTube is a commonly used and most favorable among students to go through the required recorded videos for language lessons which can easily be accessed by the computer and mobile phones. Blog is another tool through which students can get authentic materials relating to business-specific purposes, students are much aware and often visits for learning purposes. Webinars are trending worldwide where lead educators deliver a lecture on specific language topic which is usually a live telecast through podcasts. The recorded audio or video lectures can later be downloaded.

Question Number 5 and 6 deals with the usefulness of ICT in self-assessment and feedback enhances required linguistic competencies. It is learned, students are adaptive to browse for required materials. They have the skills to compare their work with the required standards. They have access to authentic materials, educational videos

by global educators, have access to blogs, digital repositories, open online-access, etc. They are good in self-assessment process. The feedback by their teachers and through online platforms are essentially important to enhance their learning processes as feedback is the most essential component of alternative assessment in self-assessment process ICT tools are essentially important for both written and verbal communication.

8.2 TEACHERS' RESPONSES: QUESTIONNAIRE B

Question Number 1 deals with ICT enabled tools to develop interest among students to develop portfolios. Out of 5 teachers, 2 of them Strongly Agree, 2 Agree while the remaining 1 Disagree. Since most of the teachers endorse the use of ICT tools are interesting and convenient for students to develop portfolios in Business English classrooms. The exposure to information technology has altered and expanded the horizons of education, especially language learning.

Question Number 2 deals with the motivation of self-learning with ICT enabled tools. Out of 5, 2 Strongly Agree, 1 Agree and 2 Disagree. Though most of the teachers agree, the disagreement with others is due to 'digital divide'. The students are interested in getting exposed and adaptive towards digital education, but lack of access to information technology in their previous educational set-up or geographically conditioned factors make them uneasy to adapt to the situation.

Question Number 3 mentions, ICT enhances required linguistic competencies compared to the traditional pedagogy based on lectures and book readings. Out of 5, 4 Agree and 1 Disagree. Most of the teachers agree that ICT enabled tools enhances the required linguistic competencies, whereas traditional pedagogy based on lectures and book readings does not. Digital resources have many interesting materials to enhance learning by watching online videos by lead educators, blogs and webinars.

Question Number 4 and 5 based on the improvement of business writing skills as well as verbal communication. For question number 4, 4 teachers Agree and 1 Disagree while in question number 5, 3 of them Agree while 1 Disagree and the another

1 Strongly Disagree. Teachers have observed the writing skills and verbal communications have improved with most of the students but a good number of students need to improve. Where digital resources have tremendously helped students in self-learning and self-assessing skills, it has also deterioration of language in terms of spellings, excessive short forms of words and even pronunciation.

Question Number 6 deals with feedback which is taken seriously by the students for future enrichment in progress. All of the 5 teachers agree that the feedback is the key component of self-assessment/portfolio assessment. The feedback given to the students are much welcomed and perceive it as a future reference to excel in their work.

9.0 CONCLUSION

Feedback is the key component of the alternative assessment which is perceived as future reference for enrichment. The responses were maximum positive towards portfolio assessment in Business English classrooms by integrating ICT enabled tools. The performance towards self-learning and self-assessment is good among the students and teachers are satisfied. The constraint found is due to 'digital divide'. The linguistic competence among the students is satisfactory and it responds well towards reflective learning. Still, it needs to be enhanced further to fulfill the global needs.

10.0 FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

More and more ICT enabled language classrooms to be established to bridge 'digital divide'

Making students more aware about the business specific writings, terminologies, phrases, registers for better performance at the future workplace.

More developments needed for building self-learning and self-assessment skills.

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Appendix A

Students' Responses

The questionnaire intends to explore the effectiveness of portfolios by using ICT enabled tools in Business English Classrooms, developing critical thinking, self-learning and self-assessment skills in teaching-learning processes.

Age:

Gender:

Course of Study

Semester:

Mother Language:

Previous Employment, if any:

S.No.	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	ICT tools are useful in developing portfolios				
2.	ICT tools such as web2.0, Google docs, YouTube, webinars and blogs provides authentic materials				
3.	ICT tools enables to provide business-specific verbs, phrases, registers and genres				
4.	ICT tools provide notable tips and suggestions in business writings and readings				
5.	Feedback enhances required linguistic competencies				
6.	ICT tools are useful in self –assessment				

Declaration: I declare, the data collected from the students and teachers of the respective department will only be used for academic purposes. The required acknowledgments will be mentioned in the paper, if published.

Appendix B

Teachers' Responses

The questionnaire intends to gauge students' performance and attitude towards Portfolio Assessment in Business English Classrooms

Teaching Experience:

Courses Taught:

Previous Employment, if any:

S.No.	Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	Using ICT tools develops interest among students in developing Portfolios				
2.	ICT tools develops motivation in the process of self-learning				
3.	ICT tools enhances linguistic competency compared to the traditional pedagogy based on lectures and book readings				
4.	There is improvement in business writings i.e. business letters, E-mails, projects and assignments				
5.	There is enhancement of verbal communication in terms of pronunciation, presentation skills				
6.	Feedback and suggestions provided to students are taken seriously for future enrichment				

Declaration: I declare that the data collected from the students and teachers of the respective department will only be used for academic purposes. The required acknowledgments will be mentioned in the paper, if published.