Preparation of e-portfolio as part of job application skills of undergraduates: A Qualitative Examination

Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan, Nurzarina Abdul Samad, Muhammad Ashraf Omar, Elizabeth M. Anthony

Abstract: The practice of preparing e-portfolio as part of job application skills is ubiquitous nowadays. Hence, the university undergraduates need to be trained to incorporate e-portfolio as part of their job application procedures so that they stand a better chance to obtain their dream job in this competitive world. This practice is pertinent as their short of experience in job experience can be compromised in this way to highlight their ability in task accomplishments. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the perceptions of e-portfolio preparation as part of job application skills and to investigate the impact of e-portfolio practice among the final year undergraduates in the universities. The research design for this study was a quantitative method. 40 reflective journals were collected from a whole class of final year undergraduates from a public university Malaysia. Fundamentally, usefulness and challenges were two important factors that affected and impacted the final production of the e-portfolio. The participants found that e-portfolio was beneficial for them due to its usefulness in terms of five themes: learners' ability, smoothness, attitude, motivation, and appreciation. However, there were also challenges found which were categorized under four themes: time constraint, lack of skill, accessibility, and limited software features. The study showed that despite the challenges faced in preparing the e-portfolio, the participants felt that e-portfolio has enhanced their confidence level in attending interviews in future.

Keywords: challenges e-portfolio, job application skills, learner ability, usefulness.

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century job market is incredibly challenging and frustrating for graduates [1]. In this case, Malaysia is no exception. Apparently, in 2017, Malaysia produced 238,187 graduates and 54,103 of them were unemployed in the first six months after their graduation [2]. The situation became worse as the unemployment rate among youth in Malaysia was at 10.8 percent rate which was higher than many other ASEAN countries such as Singapore (4.6 percent), Thailand (5.9 percent) and Vietnam (7 percent) [3]. It seems graduates need to work even harder just to get recognized in this overly competitive digital world. The research done pertaining to graduate unemployment has raised a few key questions and one of them is the readiness of the human capital base [4] where many major companies' pointed at the inadequate skills or at least the presentation of these skills which prevents them from recruiting young graduates. This shows there is a profound need to showcase the graduates' skills and ability extraordinarily as a way to market themselves. Basically, the current employers look forward to receiving more advanced documents such as e-portfolios rather than paper resume and hard copies as part of the job application requirements [5]. Thus, preparing portfolio, especially e-portfolio skills would be a useful skill for university students to make them stand out among their competitors as well as prepare them for attending interview before being selected for a job.

II. E-PORTFOLIO IN JOB APPLICATION SKILLS

The advancement of technology and its ever growing presence has triggered a wave of change in the presentation of one's portfolio from the traditional hardcopy to the modern electronic way. Paper portfolio was introduced in teacher education programs in the 1980s as a way to assist students to find jobs [6]. However, this technique has evolved as e-portfolio with the advancement of technology, globally. An electronic portfolio or e-portfolio creates a platform for undergraduates to showcase their creativity and effort as part of their job preparation skills apart from their academic activities [7]. An e-portfolio incorporates latest technologies in which the developer is able prepare the compilations of their related documents in various media types including audio, video, graphics, and text [8];[9]. In addition, e-portfolio was also found to help learners with the language learning [10]. Thus, it is imperative to first understand the use of portfolio in the education context. In addition, the constructivist approach also supports the student-centered activities such as preparing e-portfolio which is the root of modern education methods and techniques [11]. Some researchers claim that portfolio is a reflection of students' success in one or more areas [12] while others sees it as a self-evaluation process whereby the students could evaluate their own personal development and create a foundation for evaluating their own personal development individually [13]. Besides, a study conducted by The Association of American Colleges and Universities showed that more

Revised Manuscript Received on November 11, 2019.
* Correspondence Author
Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan, Center for Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
Nurzarina Abdul Samad, Center for Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
Muhammad Ashraf Omar, Center for Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.
Elizabeth M. Anthony, Center for Language Studies, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia.

than 80% of employers who participated in their study considered that e-portfolios contributed in helping the job applicants to highlight their abilities required for the success of their companies [14].

Electronic portfolio or e-portfolio is a digital collection of a person's qualifications, abilities, experience, effort and progress and these collections are depicted in various digital media such as infographic, web application, audio, video and others [15]. Students are being introduced to the use of e-portfolio to present themselves to the potential employers as well as a medium to keep artefacts in regards to their professional development. The e-portfolio is used to create and store their resume with an easy access to constantly update their progress and achievements. It also offers the possibility of having a recorded self-introductory, multimedia presentation or podcast as part of the students' repertoire. With e-portfolio there is a sense of limitless representation and as mentioned by [16], the whole idea of e-portfolio is to give others a complete sense of what a person is all about and come away with an entirely new understanding of who that person is and what they can do. Utilizing an e-portfolio for job seeking purposes is an extremely valuable tool for students in particular and potential employers in general. A study conducted by [5] showed that about 85% of the employers involved in their study agreed to visit the link sent to them with regard to students' e-portfolio in terms of job application issues. E-portfolio helps employers in identifying specific qualities and qualifications of an applicant and provide substantial information which helps them in making a decision. Since the pool for job vacancy gets smaller, it is even more important to identify qualified individuals [17]. Some researchers highlighted that e-portfolios could be the key puzzle to accomplish a successful interview [18]. Recent trends have shown that paper resumes and portfolios are becoming a thing of a past and it is now imperative to maintain a positive online presence just to stand a chance [5]. Enabling potential employers to have access to a wide range of information allows students to exhibit their achievement and specialization on top of their educational background in a creative environment. As the students improve themselves and gain more experience, the e-portfolio can continue to be updated with additional information creating an ecosystem of a living resume [16].

E-portfolios may be perceived differently by students based on their level of acceptability towards the use of the technology. Due to the novelty of e-portfolios in the job application process, very little research has been done to comprehend the perceptions on e-portfolios [5]. In order for e-portfolio to be widely recognized the users or as in this research the students acceptance is very important. Their perceptions toward the use and ease would determine continued usage. Criteria for a successful e-portfolio system include robust integrated technology architecture, lifelong sustenance, transportability and ease of use [19]. User friendliness and acceptance of e-portfolio system are two of the most profound requirements to fulfil as the problem could turn into frustration and later simply abandoning the confusing technology. Therefore, this paper investigates the practice of e-portfolio among the undergraduates of a university in Malaysia. For this purpose, the final year

students' perceptions were explored to study the practice of preparing e-portfolio as part of the job application skills.

2.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:
• To explore the perceptions of e-portfolio preparation as part of job application skills the university.
• To investigate the impact of e-portfolio practice among the final year undergraduates in the universities.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative in nature where the technique of reflective journals was used. A purposive sampling was employed by selecting a group of final year students taking an English course at University Tun Hussien Onn Malaysia (UTHM). The whole class containing 40 undergraduates participated in reflecting the practice of e-portfolio as a part of job application skills. Thus, 40 reflective journals were collected for data analysis. The study inquired into the perspective of the research participants based on in-depth and robust data collection and analysis. The analysis was data driven where the undergraduates' reflections were analysed and thematised based on criteria in e-portfolio preparation and its impact on their job application skills. The participants were encouraged to elaborate their views and clarify their responses during the reflection process. Some specific questions were also asked to develop themes during the interviews. All the reflections were analyzed by the first author. The participants were asked to complete their reflections based on their own experiences of preparing the e-portfolio as part of the course requirement. Data collection was completed and ended based on saturation point when no further themes and information emerged to add in order to further understand the practice. Subsequently, nine major themes under two categories (of usefulness and challenges) were identified which were mailed to the participants for their review. They examined the themes and confirmed that the themes reflected their viewpoints and experiences.

IV. RESULTS

Based on the analysis conducted on the 40 reflective journals, there were usefulness and challenges highlighted by the participants. There were five themes on usefulness and four themes on challenges. The findings of this study also supports the findings from the research conducted by [20] where usefulness was one main factor in incorporating technology in studies.

Usefulness

Five themes emerged based on the analysis conducted on the reflective journals which are: learners' ability, smoothness, attitude, motivation, and appreciation. Students are expected to be able to integrate the values into their real-life situation. The views highlighted in the reflective journals are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes of Participants' Views on Usefulness

Themes	Participants' Views
learners' ability	-produce more interesting, attractive and outstanding resume -learnt how to write/design resume & cover letter -learnt the content & format
smoothness	-focus on the content that are needed in a resume -meet the exact needs of the user -resume becomes easy to read
attitude	-is easy for viewing -allows for easy access in highlighting significant works, experience and achievements of the participants -provides tangible proof of your skill and abilities
motivation	-enhance my opportunity getting the job -help me stand out to employers
appreciation	- promotes paperless condition -a useful tool to include in an interview

Majority of the participants declared that they were able to produce more interesting, attractive and outstanding resume from the e-portfolio. With the availability of various templates and functions in the software, the participants just need to choose their preferred template and fill in their details for the resume. They also stated that they have learnt how to write and design resume and cover letter using the software. Besides the techniques, they also learnt on the format and content of the job application documents. Although the features provided may be limited for some software, but it is believed that the e-portfolio helps the participants to create a more appealing resume. As one of the participants expressed, "…even I do not know how to design a creative resume, through software, my resume become more creative and attractive." It shows that the software is highly significant in encouraging innovation and creativity among the participants. Also, it was also highlighted by one of the participants that the software used for the resume production meets the needs of the users which reflects the smoothness of the application of e-portfolio by the participants.

Some participants shared on their perceptions on e-portfolio in which they think that it is easy for viewing especially in understanding the content, therefore, it is user friendly. Also, they feel that the e-portfolio allows for easy access in highlighting significant works, experience and achievements of the participants. One of the participants mentioned, "…most of the software used are very friendly user, which is all the functions to design are easy to be used." Other than that, another participant expressed, "… e-portfolio provides tangible proof of your skill and abilities…". This shows that the participants strongly believe that e-portfolio provides a pleasant presentation of the participants' best qualities for job-seeking purposes. Besides, some of the participants also consider that e-portfolio is a very convenient tool in job-seeking process as it promotes paperless condition as mentioned by one of the participants, "…it also promotes us

to work in paperless condition through online or digital platform…". Hence, it is considered as environmental-friendly when using e-portfolio as the main medium for job application.

The participants found that the practice of e-portfolio has illuminated them about the creative ways of preparing the documents which generally boosted their confidence level in the hope of obtaining the jobs of their dreams. The finding is also in accordance with argument by some researchers that psychomotor domain and affective domain are involved in emphasizing the learners' ability in performing sequences of activities to a targeted level of accuracy and smoothness as well as focusing on the learners' attitude, motivation and valuing what is being learned [21]. Thus, the usefulness of e-portfolio among the participants are plenty.

Challenges

The participants also expressed some challenges while using the e-portfolio in preparing resume. Four themes (time constraint, lack of skill, accessibility, and limited software features) emerged from the analysis. Table 2 highlights the themes and the participants' sample views.

Table 2: Themes and Participants' Views on Challenges

Themes	Participants' Views
Time constraint	-spending additional time to explore the functions available in the software
Lack of skill	-difficult to understand and editing the content when we first used it
Accessibility	-some of the software and templates are only available in trial version - probability of account being hacked is high
Limited software features	-limited customization features available on the software -hard to design our resume based on our interest -cannot choose our own font

Some of them highlighted on the lack of knowledge in navigating the software in which they end up spending additional time to explore the functions available in the software. One of them stated "...it is difficult to understand and editing the content when we first used it, like we do not know how to insert new pages, where this led us to another challenge, which is time consuming." A large number of the participants also stated on the purchasing issue as some of the software and templates are only available in trial version, hence, require them to pay. One of the participants highlighted, "...it definitely wanted us to purchase their services to continue, I find this a bit difficult as I don't have any allowance for purchasing them….". As young undergraduates, spending money on software might not be their priority thus, according to them, it is unnecessary and unworthy. In this situation, the educators could suggest and encourage the students to use more options of software that are free and accessible.

Other than that, five of the participants mentioned on the limited customization features available on the software. One of them stated that, "…some of the software resume builders might have limited customization features. It makes us hard to design our resume based on our interest,". Being young learners, they hold various ideas and concepts when it comes to designing and presenting resumes and job profiles, thus, the software might not reach their expectations in applying more attractive templates and layouts. The analyses show that even though there are plenty of usefulness in using the e-portfolio, there are also some challenges for the participants.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This qualitative research has shown complex perspectives of the undergraduates based on their own e-portfolio preparation experiences. This study explored the perceptions of the Malaysian university undergraduates and the impact of e-portfolio preparation as part of job application skills. The study provides an in-depth and holistic understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the undergraduate students in relation to job application skills. The undergraduates expressed that they realized incorporating electronic devices such as the online websites in preparing their resume, cover letter and other related qualifications are important and useful. The participants admitted that they were slightly reluctant in the beginning to incorporate the electronic technology into their portfolio preparation mainly because they were not used to it. Besides, they did not have much idea about the mechanism of the platforms. Nonetheless, they did not have a choice as it was one of their course requirements and assignments. Thus, they proceeded into learning the ways of incorporating the online platforms. Subsequently, they changed their perceptions after completing their assignments where they found it to be very useful. In the context of this study, the participants found that e-portfolio was beneficial for them due to its usefulness in terms of five themes: learners' ability, smoothness, attitude, motivation, and appreciation.

The participants agreed that the use of e-portfolio undoubtedly increased the credibility of their application and chances of obtaining a chance to be selected or called for interviews. This is because their final products of the e-portfolios were found to be far more appealing than the hard copies. The online platforms had helped the participants not only to prepare the required documents with the help the provided formats but also to prepare them as creatively as possible to make utmost attractive to their potential employers. Furthermore, the content of the portfolio was arranged briefly and precisely with all the necessary information furnished in it making it smooth for readers to comprehend. The participants developed a positive attitude towards the e-portfolio preparation as they began to realize that it is user friendly once they grasped the knowledge of using the platforms well. This finding also supported the study conducted by [22] where preparing portfolio helped students to have positive attitudes towards language learning. They were glad that they were able to produce a set of document that comprise all their job related details as well to show off their creativity as well. All the effort of leaning

about the online platform and preparing the e-portfolio had also enhanced the participants' motivation level as they stated they this move had increased their confidence level as to attend the interviews when they would be called for one. Meanwhile, some participants also appreciated the acts of that preparing e-platform which was good for the environment as it helped to go paperless. The awareness of environment is also important for students [23]. Therefore, all the participants found that the practice of e-portfolio as part of job application skill was effective.

However, they also faced some challenges in the process of the e-portfolio preparation. The challenges were categorized in terms of four themes: time constraint, lack of skill, accessibility, and limited software features. Although there were input given during the lectures, they struggled as they took a lot of time to manage the online platforms individually in order to produce an attractive product of their e-portfolio. Furthermore, they were new to this system as they only had experience with the hardcopies of portfolio preparation. Despite their technological abilities involving scanning documents and submitting documents online, the participants found that managing e-portfolio platforms was rather taxing as they did not have specific prior knowledge and skills to handle it. Furthermore, they also found that the online platforms were not easily accessible as they had to log on to the site each time they wanted access their document. In addition, when they share the link with other, the documents require passwords. Besides, there are some platforms which charges the users. Some platforms provide free service but only for certain amount of time or with trial version for a short period of time. Thus, the participants found it difficult to make use of the platforms at their own time comfort. Nevertheless, the participants managed to overcome the challenges with their tireless effort and positivism as they began to find its usefulness. Thus, the practice of e-portfolio had a positive impact on the undergraduates in terms of job preparation skills.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

This study is very significant especially in highlighting the importance of having to prepare sufficiently for job application especially by using the online platforms that are available. This would not only enhance the creativity skills among the undergraduates but also enhances the good impression of their future employers in terms of the undergraduates' efforts in preparing a task at hand. Apparently, this study was limited to a group of undergraduates from one public university in Malaysia due to economical reason and time constraint. Thus, the researchers would like to suggest that this study could be done on a larger scale in future so that more issues can be elicited so that the course can be improvised to benefit the undergraduates even in more sophisticated manner. In a nutshell, the researchers would like to make the following recommendations to heighten the practice of e-portfolio among the students:

- Practice e-portfolio more often so that it becomes a norm
- Incorporate e-portfolio as part of course requirements for more courses in universities.

Encourage the nation to go paperless as much as possible by utilizing the electronic platforms

VII. SPONSORING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

1. McCabe, M. B. (2017). Social media marketing strategies for career advancement: An analysis of LinkedIn. Journal of Business and Behavioral Science, 29(1), 85-99.
2. Sistem Kajian Pengesanan Graduan, KPM / Tracer Study, MOE Statistik Pendidikan Tinggi 2018 : Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia 1 Feb 2019.
3. Theedgemarkets.com AmBank Research (March 12)- moderate domestic growth outlook could put upwards pressure on unemployment. Retrieved on 16 September 2019
4. Ibrahim, D. H. M., & Mahyuddin, M. Z. (2017). Youth Unemployment in Malaysia: Developments and Policy Considerations. Outlook and Policy, Annual Report.
5. Ronda L. Leahy and Ariana Filiatrault (2017). Employers' Perceptions of the Benefits of Employment Electronic Portfolios. International Journal of ePortfolio, 7(2), 217-223 http://www.theijep.com
6. Lyons, N. (1998). With portfolio in hand: Validating the new teacher's professionalism. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
7. Adadan, E., & Oner, D. (2018). Examining preservice teachers' reflective thinking skills in the context of web-based portfolios: The role of metacognitive awareness. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, *43*(11), 26.
8. Barrett H. Directions in Electronic Portfolio Development. CITE Journal, 1998; Vol. 2(4). pp. 559-576
9. Balaa, S.S., Wan Mansorb, W.F.A., Stapac, M. & Zakariad, M. H. (2912). Aligning Theoretical Knowledge with Professional Practice Digital Portfolio and Professional Development of Language Teachers. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 66, pp176 – 186. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.11.259
10. Chui C.S., & Dias C. (2017). The Integration of E-Portfolios in the Foreign Language Classroom: Towards Intercultural and Reflective Competences. In: Chaudhuri T., Cabau B. (eds) E-Portfolios in Higher Education: A Multidisciplinary Approach. Pp.53-74. Springer, Singapore.
11. Yastibas, A.E & Yastibas, G, C. (2014). The use of e-portfolio-based assessment to develop students' self-regulated learning in English language teaching. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 176, 3 – 13. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.01.437
12. Hartmann, C., & Calandra, B. (2004). Teacher e-Portfolio communities: Diffusion of design knowledge as a catalyst for teacher learning. In Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference (pp. 110-117). Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education (AACE).
13. Basken, P. (2008). Electronic portfolios may answer calls for more accountability. Chronicle of Higher Education, 54(32), A30-A31.
14. Association of American Colleges and Universities. (2013). *It takes more than a major: Employer priorities for college learning and student success.* Retrieved from http://www.aacu.org/leap/presidentstrust/compact/2013 SurveySummary.cfm
15. Yu, T. (2012). *E-portfolio, a valuable job search tool for college students*. Campus-Wide Information Systems.
16. Drury, M. (2006). E-portfolios-an effective tool. *Universitas*, 2(2), 1-7. Retrieved from https://universitas.uni.edu/archive/fall06/pdf/art_drury.pdf
17. Strohmeier, S. (2010). Electronic portfolios in recruiting? A conceptual analysis of usage. *Journal of Electronic Commerce Research,* 11(4), 268.
18. Woodbury, D., Neal, W., & Addams, L. (2008). The career portfolio-Teaching students to market themselves. In Allied Academies International Conference. *Academy of Educational Leadership. Proceedings* (Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 49). Jordan Whitney Enterprises, Inc.
19. Riedinger, B. (2006). Mining for meaning: Teaching students how to reflect. In *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios* (pp. 90-101). IGI Global.
20. Davis, F. D. (1989). Perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and user acceptance of information technology. MIS quarterly, 319-340.
21. Kasilingam, G., Ramalingam,M.,& Chinnavan, E. (2014). Assessment of learning domains to improve student's learning in higher education. *Journal of Young Pharmacists Vol 6, Issue 4.* pp.29-30
22. Demirela, M & Dumanba, H. (2015). The Use Of Portfolio In English Language Teaching And Its Effects On Achievement And Attitude. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 191, 2634 – 2640. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.598
23. Sa'di, I.T. (2019). Identifying Differences in the Level of Environmental Awareness among Male Students: A Case of Lower Elementary Grades. I*nternational Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research,* 18(8), pp. 1-16. https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.18.8.1

Retrieval Number: C10391183S319/2019©BEIESP
DOI: 10.35940/ijrte.C1039.1183S319

110

Published By:
Blue Eyes Intelligence Engineering
& Sciences Publication