



The viability of alternative assessment methods in the Greek upper secondary school: the oral portfolio

[Η βιωσιμότητα εναλλακτικών μεθόδων αξιολόγησης στο Ελληνικό λύκειο: ο φάκελος αξιολόγησης για τον προφορικό λόγο]

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The final examination of the English language subject, in the context of the Greek state upper secondary education, is a traditional paper-and-pencil test which does not include any assessment of oracy skills. This article explores the viability of the oral portfolio as an alternative assessment and pedagogic method that can facilitate the assessment of speaking and listening skills and create a more motivating learning environment. To this effect, three methodological tools were designed, namely, a questionnaire addressing upper secondary English teachers in Greek state schools, a case study involving an oral portfolio implementation and finally, a questionnaire for students to record their experience. The study demonstrates that implementation of the portfolio contributed to a successful assessment of oracy skills and that it was a stimulating experience for students. The results of the study also showed that the pedagogical value of the portfolio counterbalanced its practical constraints. The paper concludes by putting forward recommendations for the future application of this assessment technique in state school education.

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Η τελική αξιολόγηση του μαθήματος της Αγγλικής γλώσσας, στα πλαίσια της Ελληνικής δημόσιας ανώτερης δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, διεξάγεται μέσω μίας παραδοσιακής γραπτής δοκιμής η οποία δεν περιλαμβάνει καμία αξιολόγηση του προφορικού λόγου. Το άρθρο αυτό διερευνά τη βιωσιμότητα της αξιολόγησης του προφορικού λόγου βάσει φακέλου ως μία εναλλακτική μέθοδο αξιολόγησης και διαπαιδαγώγησης που μπορεί να διευκολύνει τη διαδικασία αξιολόγησης της παραγωγής και κατανόησης προφορικού λόγου και των ακουστικών δεξιοτήτων και να δημιουργήσει περισσότερα κίνητρα για μάθηση. Για το σκοπό αυτό, σχεδιάστηκαν τρία μεθοδολογικά εργαλεία και συγκεκριμένα, ένα ερωτηματολόγιο απευθυνόμενο σε καθηγητές Αγγλικής γλώσσας της ανώτερης δευτεροβάθμιας εκπαίδευσης, μία περιπτωσιολογική μελέτη που αφορούσε στην εφαρμογή ενός φακέλου αξιολόγησης με αντικείμενο τον προφορικό λόγο, και τέλος, ένα ερωτηματολόγιο που δόθηκε στους μαθητές για να καταγράψουν την εμπειρία τους. Η έρευνα καταδεικνύει ότι η εφαρμογή του φακέλου μπορεί να συμβάλει στην επιτυχή αξιολόγηση του προφορικού λόγου και αποτελεί μία ενθαρρυντική εμπειρία για τους

μαθητές λυκείου. Τα αποτελέσματα επίσης κατέδειξαν ότι η παιδαγωγική αξία του φακέλου εξισορρόπησε τους πρακτικούς της περιορισμούς. Το άρθρο τελιώνει κάνοντας υποδείξεις για τη μελλοντική εφαρμογή αυτής της τεχνικής στα δημόσια σχολεία.

Key words: alternative assessment, traditional paper-and-pencil tests, oral portfolio, oral assessment, oracy skills.

Introduction

Recently, there has been a shift in students' assessment towards alternative assessment methods. This shift is of great importance in education and, in particular, it has beneficial implications for the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning in the Greek upper secondary school. To be promoted to the next class in the present context, students need to take a traditional paper-and-pencil test at the end of the school year. The format of the test is specified by a Presidential Decree (60/2006/F.E.K 65 F.E.K A'). This achievement test excludes the assessment of oracy skills, i.e., listening and speaking. The current study attempts to explore the viability of the oral portfolio as a representative alternative assessment and pedagogic method. It is argued that the portfolio is an efficient and stimulating assessment tool of oracy skills.

The paper begins with a discussion of the concerns that have been raised about traditional testing in contrast to the favourable learning conditions that alternative assessment, and, more specifically, portfolio, creates. It presents the teaching context of the study and its methodological instruments, namely, a questionnaire addressing upper secondary EFL teachers, a case study, and a students' questionnaire. The final section discusses issues in the implementation of the portfolio and provides practical guidelines for its implementation.

Testing and Alternative Assessment

'Testing' and 'alternative assessment' techniques have been both used to assess Foreign Language Learning (FLL). In the Greek state educational context, 'testing' refers to official, standardized measurement procedures, administered on a 'one-off' basis at specified times of a school year, which take the form of paper-and-pencil tests. On the other hand, 'alternative assessment' models collect assessment evidence with informal procedures over a period of time under no time constraints, which makes them low-stakes in terms of consequences (Alderson and Banerjee, 2001, p. 228). Moreover, alternative assessment results are qualitative and take the form of a profile. This is much more useful and informative compared to a single test score as it provides details concerning each student's growth, attitude and current needs. Furthermore, alternative assessment offers opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction (Stiggins, 2001, p. 468). In this way, alternative assessment serves a diagnostic and 'formative' function, i.e., it involves an ongoing process of gathering information on the extent of learning and on strengths and weaknesses, which teachers can feed back into their course planning and into the actual feedback they give to learners (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 186). In addition, McNamara (2000, p. 3) argues that tests are conceived to catch people out on what they do not know and consequently they can affect the psychological state of students as they are associated with feelings of anxiety and powerlessness which impede learning. On the contrary, alternative assessment is influenced by assumptions of humanistic education that

“education should deal with both dimensions of humans – the cognitive or intellectual and the affective or emotional” (Moskowitz, 1978, p. 18).

The next section discusses the characteristics of portfolios as an alternative assessment method.

Portfolio

“Portfolios in classrooms today are derived from the visual and performing arts tradition in which they serve to showcase artists’ accomplishments and personally favored works” (Sweet, 1993, p. 1). Brown and Hudson (2002, p. 81) define the portfolio as a ‘purposeful’ collection of any aspect of a student’s work that displays the efforts, skills, abilities, achievements, and contributions to a given class. Paulson et al. (1991) support that portfolios permit instruction and assessment to be woven together in a way that more traditional approaches do not. For Genesee and Upshur (1996, p. 99) the primary value of the portfolio assessment is that it can reveal students’ achievement seen as improvement and accomplishment against both an earlier point of development, and a goal that provides a target and a direction. Noticing improvement when comparing work over time motivates students (Stiggins, 2001, p. 469). For Murphy (1994), portfolio assessment relieves students who suffer from ‘test anxiety’ of a ‘test-like situation’, and allows the assessment process to be done as a ‘normal part of the classroom routine’. Similarly, Reineke (1998, pp. 83-84) argues that the portfolio is sensitive to students. According to Brown and Hudson (2002, pp. 81-82), the portfolio can:

- build and capitalize on the actual work done in class;
- increase student responsibility for the learning processes;
- encourage collaboration between teachers and students and change the teacher’s role from adversary to coach.

Finally, Venn (2000, p. 538) argues that portfolio assessment enables teachers and students to share the responsibility for setting learning goals and for evaluating progress towards meeting these goals. The most comprehensive and widely reported initiative of large-scale portfolio applications is the European Language Portfolio.

Motivated by the literature reviewed above, the present student set out to investigate the viability of portfolios as an alternative and pedagogic method in Greek state schools.

Teaching context

English as a school subject in the Greek senior high school curriculum has a very low status for two main factors which have set a barrier against students’ motivation (Pedagogical Institute, 2011):

- It is not connected to any high-stake language examination or certificate that would have a direct effect on students’ professional or educational life. This tempts parents and students to trust FLL to private language centres.
- It does not contribute to the total grade that determines university entrance.

Although the national curriculum for the teaching of EFL in the senior high school (Government Gazette – F.E.K 3994/11-10-99) recognizes that learners need to be able to produce spoken language and emphasizes the instruction of EFL, the format of the final

achievement test, which is specified by the Presidential Decree 60/2006 /F.E.K 65 F.E.K A', assesses only writing and reading skills. There is no current official test requirement that assesses oracy skills, i.e., listening and speaking.

This mismatch between curriculum objectives and tests is likely to lead students to study only whatever is on the tests (stressed also by Brown and Hudson 2002, p. 48). Consequently, since the focus of the final achievement test for the English language in the senior high school is on reading and writing, students are not given any incentive to practise their oracy skills, which has a negative effect on the development of comprehension and production of realistic spoken language. Moreover, it has negative consequences for teachers, as they have to adapt their teaching practices to the objectives of the final achievement test and focus only on skills that are included in it.

Research design and research questions

The current study aims to explore alternative ways to assess the oracy skills of senior high school students through the use of an oral portfolio. The aim of the study was approached empirically through the adoption of three instruments:

- a questionnaire designed to portray the beliefs, experiences and attitudes of upper secondary EFL teachers towards assessment principles and techniques;
- a case study that involved the observation of a senior high school English class where an oral assessment portfolio was implemented for a period of time;
- a questionnaire given to the students of the teaching group to assess their experience.

The research questions of the study were as follows:

1. Can the portfolio assess oracy skills effectively?
2. Is the oral portfolio an efficient pedagogic tool?
3. Can the oral portfolio create a more motivating FLL classroom in the Greek state senior high school?

The teacher questionnaire

The teacher questionnaire (Appendix I) contained nine questions. It was designed to target the teachers':

- a) opinions concerning the parameters of effective assessment;
- b) assessment practices;
- c) personal perceptions and preferences concerning oral assessment;
- d) attitudes towards portfolio assessment.

Question 1 collected the teachers' biodata. The teacher sample included 22 EFL teachers of senior high schools in Athens, capital of Greece, as well as in Cyclades, Evia and Arcadia, provinces of Greece. Among the respondents there was only one male teacher. Moreover, there were 5 holders of Masters Degrees and 2 teachers who had attended several teaching seminars. The respondents' teaching experience in years was as follows:

- 1-8 years: 5 respondents;
- 9-17 years: 5 respondents;
- 18-25 years: 6 respondents;
- 25-35 years: 6 respondents.

Question 2 involved the teachers' opinions concerning the parameters of effective assessment and consisted of four sub-questions which made enquiries about four different

aspects of assessment: a. recipients of assessment, b. purposes of assessment, c. agents of assessment, and d. marking procedures. The types of responses given were scale items that consisted of alternative responses representing degrees of importance. According to the findings of sub-question a (see Table 1), 67% of the respondents considered that it was very important for effective assessment to provide feedback to the teacher and the learner, while 47% of the respondents considered that effective assessment was important for instructional procedures.

a. Effective assessment provides feedback for the...

Recipients of assessment	1	2	3	4	5
a. teacher	67%	28%	5%	0%	0%
b. learner	67%	16.5%	16.5%	0%	0%
c. instructional procedures	47%	23.5%	23.5%	6%	0%

(1 = very important; 5 = not at all important)

Table 1. Recipients of assessment

Table 2 demonstrates the respondents' beliefs concerning the purposes of assessment. Identifying the specific needs of individual students and monitoring the effectiveness of instruction were considered very important purposes by 68.5% and 63% of the respondents respectively, while assessing and understanding students' performance in class was considered very important by 53% of the respondents. Keeping students alert was considered very important by 44% of the respondents. However, 11% of the respondents considered that this purpose was not important at all. The other two purposes of assessment were considered very important by fewer respondents. In particular, placing students into levels of ability and decisions about advancement or promotion were considered very important purposes of assessment by 23,5% and 21% of the respondents respectively.

b. The purpose of effective assessment is to...

Purposes of assessment	1	2	3	4	5
a. assess and understand students' performance in class	53%	21%	26%	0%	0%
b. identify the specific needs of individual students	68.5%	26%	5%	0%	0%
c. monitor the effectiveness of instruction	63%	16%	10.5%	10.5%	0%
d. place students into levels of language ability	23.5%	12%	41%	23.5%	0%
e. make decisions about advancement or promotion of individual students to the next level of instruction	21%	37%	21%	21%	0%
f. keep students alert	44%	17%	17%	11%	11%

Table 2. Purposes of assessment

As shown in Table 3, the primary agent of assessment should be the teacher as this agent was considered to be very important by the highest percentage of respondents (83%). Students were considered very important agents by 44,5% of the respondents, while a governmental body or institution was considered to be very important by 17% of the respondents only.

c. The agent of effective assessment is...

Agents	1	2	3	4	5
a. the teacher	83%	17%	0%	0%	0%
b. a governmental body or institution	17%	11%	17%	27.5%	27.5%
c. the student	44.5%	44.5%	11%	0%	0%

Table 3. Agents of assessment

Table 4 shows the findings of sub-question 'd' which was concerned with marking procedures. According to the results, 53% of the respondents believed that students' profiles were a very important marking procedure. Classroom performance was regarded as very important by 42.5% of the respondents, while a general impression was believed to be very important by 29% of the respondents. No respondent considered performance on tests to be a very important criterion of awarding marks.

d. Marks should be awarded on the basis of...

Marking procedures	1	2	3	4	5
a. a general impression	29%	41%	6%	6%	18%
b. performance on tests	0%	39%	50%	11%	0%
c. classroom performance	42.5%	31.5%	21%	5%	0%
d. Students' profiles that describe their performance at a range of different levels and in different areas	53%	29%	12%	6%	0%

Table 4. Marking procedures

The above results highlighted the EFL teachers' belief that traditional paper-and-pencil tests should not be the primary form of assessment. The results showed that assessment should: 1. provide feedback for the teacher, the learner and the instructional procedures, 2. identify the students' needs and monitor the effectiveness of instruction without focusing only on categorization and promotion, 3. take into consideration students' opinions concerning assessment processes and practices, and 4. award marks based on students' profiles.

Question 3 investigated the kind of assessment practices that were currently in use. This is a closed question that provides a list of assessment methods and requires respondents to report how frequently they use each one of them. Respondents had to select among four degrees of frequency: never (N), rarely (R), often (O), and nearly always (NA). As displayed in Table 5, all respondents had used traditional tests. Also, there were small percentages of respondents who had never used alternative assessment techniques such as, self-reports (9,5%), portfolio (14,5%) and peer appraisal (20%).

Assessment methods	N	R	O	NA
1. Traditional pencil-and-paper tests	0%	24%	28%	48%
2. Learner self-reports (self-appraisal, diary, record-keeping)	9,5%	24%	52%	14,5%
3. Portfolio	14,5%	33%	38%	14,5%
4. Peer appraisal	20%	45%	25%	10%

Table 5. Assessment methods currently used

Questions 4, 5 and 6 shifted the focus of the questionnaire to teachers' perceptions and preferences concerning effective oral assessment, which were expected to provide useful information for the development of the oral portfolio of the current study. Question 4 is closed and required respondents to judge the idea of assessing students' performance on subjectively-scored tasks, such as speaking and writing tasks, based on criteria rather than on a general impression of the students' performance, as 'very useful', 'OK', or 'not useful'. All respondents considered this idea to be useful. This is very important as in the context of EFL teaching in the Greek educational system, no official assessment criteria have been set for the assessment of speaking and writing.

Question 5 probed the most widely accepted criteria for students' oral performance. It required ranked responses as it asked respondents to rank their preferences from a given list of oral criteria. Respondents placed the criteria in the following order (see also Table 6): 1. ability to get the message across, 2. effort to interact, 3. fluency, 4. accuracy of language use and range of vocabulary, and 5. pronunciation. Overall, the results show that communicative criteria such as 'ability to get the message across' or 'effort to interact' were regarded more important than structural criteria, such as 'accuracy' and 'pronunciation'.

Oral assessment criteria	1	2	3	4	5
Accuracy of language use and range of vocabulary	14%	7%	14%	51%	14%
Pronunciation	0%	7%	7%	14%	72%
Fluency	0%	36%	28%	36%	0%
Ability to get the message across	72%	28%	0%	0%	0%
Effort to interact	22%	28%	50%	0%	0%

(1= the most important ... 5 = the least important)

Table 6. Oral assessment criteria

Table 7 demonstrates the findings of question 6 that contains statements concerning issues of marking procedures, objectives, and techniques of oral assessment and invites respondents to state their agreement or disagreement with them or to take a neutral position. According to the results, 52% of the respondents believed that assessment criteria should be known to candidates and 67% believed that they should vary according to the type of the speaking task. For 71% of the respondents speaking tasks should promote social interaction. Finally, nearly three quarters of the respondents were favourable to the use of the portfolio as an assessment method of the speaking skill.

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Students who sit a speaking test should know the criteria used.	52%	48%	0%
2. The marking criteria should vary according to the type of the speaking task.	67%	24%	9%
3. Speaking tasks should promote social interaction and assess students in pairs.	71%	24%	5%
4. Portfolio is a good method to assess the speaking skill.	71%	24%	5%

Table 7. Oral assessment marking procedures, objectives and techniques

Question 7 aimed to confirm the accuracy of the results obtained so far. It required respondents to provide ranked responses by answering whether they agreed 'a lot', 'quite a lot', 'a little' or 'not at all' with three statements. The findings, displayed in Table 8, demonstrated that EFL teachers were critical of traditional paper-and pencil tests, supported

that oracy skills had to be assessed officially, and considered that the portfolio could create motivating learning conditions.

Statements	A lot	Quite a lot	A little	Not at all
1. Traditional pencil-and-paper tests judge students' learning without assisting it.	24%	57%	14%	5%
2. The absence of the speaking skill from the official format of the final achievement test does not encourage teachers to teach it extensively and students to practise it.	57%	33%	5%	5%
3. The use of portfolio as an innovative instruction and assessment method can raise students' motivation towards the English language subject in the senior high school.	38%	62%	0%	0%

Table 8. Summary of results

Questions 8 and 9 explored various portfolio assessment issues. Question 8 consists of an initial closed question which required respondents to tick either 'Yes' or 'No' depending on whether they had ever used portfolio assessment systematically. This question was answered positively by only 7 respondents out of 22. These respondents had received further training since their graduation.

Question 8 is also followed up by two open questions. The first open question required from those respondents who had answered positively to the previous question to refer to the benefits of this type of assessment. The respondents reported that the portfolio promotes autonomy, self-fulfillment and greater involvement, and provides evidence of progress on an on-going nature. The second open question consists of two parts and required the rest of the respondents to refer to factors that a. could encourage them to use portfolio assessment and b. impede the use of the portfolio. The factors that could encourage teachers to use portfolio in their classrooms were: adequate portfolio knowledge, fewer students and more teaching time. Factors which impeded the use of the portfolio were: lack of portfolio knowledge, lack of students' interest, lack of time and material resources, the heavy workload that the portfolio entails, and mixed ability classes.

Question 9 consists of scale response items. This question addressed only teachers with portfolio experience and required them to state how strongly they agree or disagree with the existence of some advantages and drawbacks of the portfolio that have been reported in literature in the field. The data gathered (see Table 9) confirmed the beliefs held by many educational experts concerning the potential of the portfolio to provide evidence on students' abilities, attitudes and developmental processes, as well as diagnostic information about corrective action. Moreover, 67% strongly disagreed with the statement that the portfolio assessment provides totally unreliable results and 50% agreed that the portfolio involves a time-consuming and costly procedure.

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. Portfolios carry an optimal amount of information about students' abilities.	58.5%	33%	8.5%	0%	0%
2. Portfolios reflect students' attitudes and developmental processes that take place in their learning over time.	58.5%	33%	8.5%	0%	0%
3. Portfolios provide diagnostic information about corrective action to be taken by students and for	41.5%	50%	8.5%	0%	0%

instruction by revealing students' improvement or lack of it over time.					
4. Portfolios help students get engaged in their learning and make them more autonomous.	50%	33%	8.5%	8.5%	0%
5. Portfolio assessment provides totally unreliable results for students' performances.	0%	8.5%	8.5%	16%	67%
6. Portfolio involves a time-consuming and costly procedure.	8%	8.5%	50%	8.5%	25%

(1 = strongly agree 5 = strongly disagree)

Table 9. Advantages and drawbacks of the portfolio

Overall, the analysis of the questionnaire data provides evidence of the teachers' belief that oracy skills should be assessed using an alternative assessment method such as portfolios. The next section presents the implementation of an oral portfolio for the purposes of a case study according to the findings of the current questionnaire.

Case study: a portfolio implementation

The case study involved the implementation of an oral portfolio (5 month duration) in the first grade of the senior high school located in Dionysus, a suburb of Athens, capital of Greece during the academic year 2006-2007. The participants were 18 students. They were all sixteen years old. The syllabus was based on the coursebook 'Get real 2' by Helbling languages (Hobbs & Keddle, 2006), which targeted a B2 proficiency level on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001).

During the implementation period observations were conducted to provide empirical data on the effectiveness of the oral portfolio not only as an assessment but also as a pedagogic tool. The intention here was that, apart from assessing, portfolios were used as a way to facilitate English language learning, to motivate learners, to activate reflection on learning processes, and to promote self-assessment and autonomy. Moreover, the portfolio aimed to gain information about the oral portfolio practicalities so as to guide teachers towards the inclusion of this technique in their own classrooms.

Implementation of the portfolio

The portfolio took the form of a plastic folder. It contained:

- an audio-cassette with four obligatory speaking core tasks;
- an audio-cassette with four optional speaking tasks;
- documents such as: a teacher's assessment report and a student's self-assessment report for each core task, and a student's reflective report for each optional task.

Successful presentation of the portfolio entailed that it contained all the recorded tasks and paper work, and was worth 20% of the total portfolio grade. The portfolio was given two points that were added to the students' first semester grade.

To implement the portfolio in class, several steps were taken. To begin with, in early September 2006, the school principal and students were informed of a new, student-friendly assessment method. Students were given written guidelines to clarify the teaching goals, format, content and deadline of the portfolio. A preparation period followed to familiarize students with spoken tasks and to practise self-assessment skills. Four core tasks were performed. They were intended to make the assessment process a learning process and

involved pairs of students randomly formed to enhance meaning negotiation. The teacher set up the task, ensured that students knew how to proceed and then recorded students' performance. Students listened to their recorded performance at home and produced a list of errors to serve as a basis for individualized instruction and to elicit self-correction.

All core tasks followed the principles of communicative language tests, which "*are intended to be a measure of how the testees are able to use language in real life situations*" and reflect the communicative situations in which testees are likely to find themselves in the future (Kitao & Kitao, 1996). The tasks displayed many of the communicative features identified by Nation (1989, pp. 24-29), such as split information, steps, assignment of roles, and existence of a goal and an outcome.

Core tasks were 'graded' i.e., presented in an order that permitted demands on the learners to increase gradually. Also, skills assessed in prior activities were deemed necessary for succeeding ones. Appendix II presents the fourth task of the portfolio, which involves story-telling based on picture stimuli that create an information gap leading to interaction. Task 4 was the last task the testees had to perform because it was considered to be the most difficult as, according to Ellis (2003, p. 206), tasks requiring construction of interpretations of visual stimuli generate great complexity.

Core tasks were marked through an assessment form (Appendix III) that was filled in immediately after each performance. The assessment form was a 'rating scale'. This is a short description of different levels of language ability that aims to describe what the learner can do at each level and to help the assessor decide what score to give (Underhill, 1987, p. 98). The rating scales of the portfolio were 'analytic', i.e., they contained five separate categories of criteria, and separated out three levels of language ability to encourage the assessor to give a number of scores, which makes scoring more reliable (Hughes, 1989, p. 94). The assessment form provided the necessary metalanguage for giving feedback to the students in the form of a profile that indicated areas of strength and weakness.

Optionally, students could record a personal oral performance of their choice, such as a monologue or an intercultural experience. Optional tasks satisfied the teacher's need for information about students' performance outside classtime, and gave students the possibility to maintain ownership and responsibility of their work. Students with four optional tasks gained an extra point to the total portfolio grade, but there was no marking penalty if students did not manage to record any.

Students were also required to fill in a self-assessment report for each core task (Appendix IV) and a second report for each optional task (Appendix V). Self-assessment motivated learners to transform weaknesses into learning goals and encouraged them to reflect on their progress and the quality of their performance in relation to known criteria. Additionally, learners reported their feelings while making use of higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis and observation. These are lifelong learning skills that enhance autonomy.

A teacher-student, ten-minute, private conference was conducted after each core task to discuss the list of errors and reports establishing a good teacher-student rapport and promoting joint goal-setting and negotiation of grades. Conferences provided students with supportive comments that helped them recognize and enjoy their accomplishments allowing them to develop positive self-images. These are strategies that increase learners' satisfaction and maintain their motivation (Dörnyei, 2001).

During the conference students were asked the following questions:

- Did you like your performance?
- In what ways have you improved?
- What was most difficult for you?
- What did you do when you couldn't find the appropriate word / expression to use?
- Did you do anything to help your partner when he / she couldn't continue?
- Name three things you learned about ...
- What do you think you can improve in your next performance?
- What do you think of your teacher's assessment report? Have you been fairly judged? What are the areas you disagree with?

A final conference followed after all the portfolio tasks had been performed to discuss optional tasks and their reports and also check on the portfolio contents. Students were asked some of the following questions:

- What kinds of spoken performances have you included in your portfolio?
- Choose one task you are most proud of and say why ...
- Do you solve problems the same way you did earlier in the year? How do you solve them now?
- What would you like to do next, using what you learned from this task?

A follow-up event was organized at the end of the portfolio period. This involved a competition for the most interesting optional task and an award of certificates to offer praise for effort.

The student questionnaire

The student questionnaire (Appendix VI) aimed to shed light into the students' own voice about the portfolio impact. Students were invited to fill in the questionnaire anonymously during classroom time after the portfolio period had been completed. Data were collected by 16 students.

Question 1 looked at the qualities of portfolio. The results indicated that 56% of the students had become more interested in the English language, 69% realized their strengths, 88% realized their weaknesses, 69% focused their study on their weak points, and 63% gained more confidence in their speaking skills. However, the portfolio helped only 37% of the students to become well-organized and only 31% to become more responsible. Question 2 required students to compare and contrast portfolio with traditional tests. Students expressed preference towards portfolio assessment when considering that it provided easier (81%), fairer (57%), and more interesting assessment (75%), while traditional tests were regarded as less useful (81%), less helpful (56%), and more stressful (75%). Questions 3 to 7 considered specific components of the portfolio. Concerning the core tasks (Question 3), students found them interesting and guiding (94%), not stressful (63%), and not tiring (69%). However, students expressed their dissatisfaction towards performing the tasks in public, which implied that it was face-threatening.

The impact of self-assessment and conferences, which both constituted new experiences for students, was dealt with by questions 4 and 5 respectively. In particular, the majority of the students regarded self-assessment as fair (94%) and believed that it made them think about their strengths and weaknesses (81%). However, 56% admitted that it did not motivate them to study more at home. Regarding conferences, they were considered pleasant by 94%,

interesting by 75%, and helpful by 69%. Conferences were seen as a chance for better co-operation with the teacher by 94%. Furthermore, although conferences were tiring for only 19%, they were stressful for 63%.

Regarding the impact of the optional tasks (Question 6), 69% considered them a challenging experience and 81% a good opportunity to show what they could do outside classroom. Although only eight students (50%) stated that recording was difficult, only four students out of sixteen recorded optional tasks. These students admitted that they had enjoyed the recording procedure.

According to the results of question 7, neither the content nor the form of the reports complicated students, as 75% found them guiding and 81% found them easy to fill in. Finally, 87% answered positively when asked whether they would like to be assessed with a portfolio again. This was very encouraging as the oral portfolio was a novice and brief experience for the specific teaching group.

Conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, the findings of the study indicate positive changes in the students' attitude towards English as the oral portfolio can provide the driving force to sustain their active involvement in the often tedious learning process. Nevertheless, it would be useful to attempt to highlight some implementation pitfalls as well as some recommendations for teachers who are willing to experiment with new assessment techniques in accordance with their professional judgment.

Assessment is a rather unpleasant and stressful experience whatever form it may take. Portfolios are demanding and may be seen as threatening and confusing or even as another awkward and arduous trial. The students of the current teaching group seemed more comfortable with the familiar true-false test format and disliked challenging activities that entailed creativity and original work, like optional tasks, or that required more extensive responses, like reflective reports. This finding is in agreement with Nunan (1989) who suggested that learners show a preference for teacher-centred over learner-centred structures. Therefore, initial motivation has to be generated. This can be done by increasing students' expectancy of success. To maintain and protect motivation, students have to be presented with stimulating, enjoyable, and relevant oral tasks (Dörnyei, 2001). However, deadlines have to be set and enforced, while students need to be convinced that the tasks are worthwhile (Ellis, 2005, p. 25). As Foster (1998) reports, if students fail to take tasks seriously, they will view them as 'games' and eschew meaning negotiation because it detracts from the 'fun' element. Finally, although portfolio assessment aims to create a relaxing and non-judgmental setting, assessment standards should remain high.

Portfolios place extra logistic demands. Specifically, they are uneconomical in terms of material resources, such as tape recorders, folders, cassettes and photocopies, as well as of the time required to be constructed, administered and marked. Moreover, scheduling tasks in pairs and individual conferences for large classes may interfere with other instructional activities. Additionally, administering oral tasks and conferences during classtime complicates teachers as they have to maintain order while attending to the students' performance. Finally, students' portfolios require storage space.

Portfolios have to be fully integrated into the curriculum alongside traditional tests and teaching materials so as not to be seen as separate from learning and to be accepted as a

formal assessment method. Moreover, an e-portfolio platform designed by the Ministry of Education with recorded or videoed samples of students' speech would greatly attract and excite upper secondary students. At the same time, an e-portfolio would abolish the ephemeral nature of spoken discourse, as it would provide easy access to students' speech, and enable them to notice their progress as well as evoke a critical evaluation of each others' skills at various times of the school year. Finally, an e-portfolio requires minimal storage space and increases capabilities in using technology to support lifelong learning.

Finally, EFL teachers are obviously concerned with improving their assessment methods but appear to lack the opportunity, time and resources to revise and update their assessment approaches. Therefore, sufficient, in-service assessment training has to be planned and provided by the state.

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Appendix I

Questionnaire for Teachers

1. Biodata			
a. Sex: Male	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Female	<input type="checkbox"/>		
b. Teaching experience: 1-8 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	9-17 years	<input type="checkbox"/>
18-25 years	<input type="checkbox"/>	25-35 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
c. Current position of work: _____			
d. Further training: PEK	<input type="checkbox"/>		
MAAs	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other (please specify) _____			

2. Based on your experience, state your ideas about what an effective assessment policy should be like by placing a tick or a cross under the appropriate column for each statement.

(1 = very important ... 5 = not at all important)

a. Effective assessment provides feedback for the...

<i>Recipients of assessment</i>	1	2	3	4	5
a. teacher					
b. learner					
c. instructional procedures					

Other (please specify) _____

b. The purpose of effective assessment is to...

<i>Purposes of assessment</i>	1	2	3	4	5
a. assess and understand students' performance in class					
b. identify the specific needs of individual students					
c. monitor the effectiveness of instruction					
d. place students into levels of language ability					
e. make decisions about advancement or promotion of individual students to the next level of instruction					
f. keep students alert					

Other (please specify) _____

c. The agent of effective assessment is...

<i>Agents</i>	1	2	3	4	5
a. the teacher					
b. a governmental body or institution					
c. the student					

Other (please specify) _____

d. Marks should be awarded on the basis of...

<i>Marking procedure</i>	1	2	3	4	5
a. a general impression					
b. performance on tests					
c. classroom performance					
d. Students' profiles that describe their performance at a range of different levels and in different areas					

Other (please specify) _____

3. Consider the assessment methods that you use and place a tick or a cross under the appropriate column to indicate how frequently you use each one.

(N = never, R = rarely, O = often, NA = nearly always)

Assessment methods	N	R	O	NA
1. Traditional pencil-and-paper tests				
2. Learner self-reports (self-appraisal, diary, record-keeping)				
3. The building of students' profiles of abilities (portfolio)				
4. Peer appraisal				

Other (Please specify) _____

4. How do you find the idea of assessing students' performance on tasks for which there is not a single correct answer, such as speaking and writing tasks, based on criteria rather than on a general impression of the students' performance?

(Please tick)

- Very helpful
- OK
- Not helpful

5. What should the marking criteria for a speaking task be? Answer the question by numbering the following in the order you prefer.

(1 = the most important 5 = the least important)

- Accuracy of language use and range of vocabulary
- Pronunciation
- Fluency
- Ability to get the message across
- Effort to interact
- Other (please specify) _____

6. Do you agree with these statements? Put a tick in the column that shows your response.

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Students who sit a speaking test should know the criteria used			
2. The marking criteria should vary according to the type of the speaking task			
3. Speaking tasks should promote social interaction and assess students in pairs			
4. Portfolio is a good method to assess the speaking skill.			

7. Consider the following statements and indicate the degree of your agreement by circling the relevant number.

1. Traditional pencil-and-paper tests judge students' learning without assisting it.

A lot quite a lot a little not at all
 4 3 2 1

2. The absence of the speaking skill from the official format of the final achievement test does not encourage teachers to teach it extensively and students to practise it.

A lot quite a lot a little not at all
 4 3 2 1

3. The use of Portfolio as an innovative instruction and assessment method can raise students' motivation towards the English language subject in the senior high school.

A lot quite a lot a little not at all
 4 3 2 1

8. Have you ever used portfolio assessment in your classroom / with your students?

Yes

No

If Yes,

What do you consider the benefits of portfolio assessment?	
--	--

If No,

a. What would encourage you to use portfolio assessment in your teaching?	
b. What factors impede the use of assessment portfolio in your teaching?	

9. If you have ever had any portfolio experience, consider the following statements and indicate the degree of your agreement by putting a tick or a cross under the appropriate column.

(1 = strongly agree 5 = strongly disagree)

Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1. Portfolios carry an optimal amount of information about students' abilities					
2. Portfolios reflect students' attitudes and developmental processes that take place in their learning over time					
3. Portfolios provide diagnostic information about corrective action to be taken by students and for instruction by revealing students' improvement or lack of it over time					
4. Portfolios help students get engaged in their learning and make them more autonomous					
5. Portfolio assessment provides totally unreliable results for students' performances					
6. Portfolio involves a time-consuming and costly procedure					

Thank you for your cooperation!

Appendix II

Date:

Task 4: Story-telling

Student A

Part A

You are going to tell the story of Mr. Pea, a very careless driver. Look at picture A and tell your partner what Mr. Pea did in the morning, while he was driving to work. You have to speak for one minute. You start first.

When you finish, your partner will tell you what Mr. Pea did in the afternoon, when he arrived home.

Part B

Work in pairs. Look at Picture C and decide about what happened to Mr. Pea on another day. Construct a story about it. Include information on the following:

When and where

Who he was with
What he did

What happened next

The ending

Make your story as interesting as possible. You have three minutes. Remember that you have to speak in English at all times.

Part C

Narrate the second half of your story to your teacher. You have to agree with your partner at which point he / she stops and you take over. You have to speak for one minute.



Picture A



Picture C

Date:

Task 4: Story-telling

Student B

Part A

You are going to tell the story of Mr. Pea, a very careless driver. Look at picture B and tell your partner what Mr. Pea did in the afternoon, when he arrived at home. You have to speak for one minute. You start second.

Before you start, your partner will tell you what Mr. Pea did in the morning, while he was driving to work.

Part B

Work in pairs. Look at Picture C and decide about what happened to Mr. Pea on another day. Construct a story about it. Include information on the following:

When and where

Who he was with
What he did

What happened next

The ending

Make your story as interesting as possible. You have three minutes. Remember that you have to speak in English at all times.

Part C

Narrate the first half of your story to your teacher. You have to agree with your partner at which point you stop and he / she takes over. You have to speak for one minute.



Picture B



Picture C

Appendix III

Assessment Report

Student's name :Date:

Criteria	Rating scale			M a r k
	1.5-2	0.5-1.5	...-0.5	
Pronunciation	Correct pronunciation and appropriate intonation.	Pronunciation slips and inappropriate intonation occasionally.	Incomprehensible pronunciation and colourless intonation impede communication.	
Task achievement	4-6	2-4	...-2	
	Provides a credible interpretation of the picture, contributes to the construction of the story, narrates half of the story successfully, tries to make the story sound as interesting as possible, knows where to stop / start, produces two long turns lasting approximately one minute each.	Provides an interpretation of the picture with some support, limited contribution to the construction of the story, narrates half of the story with some support, the story produced is rather dull, has to be reminded when to stop / start, produces two long turns lasting approximately half a minute each.	Fails to provide an adequate interpretation of the picture even with a lot of support, does not contribute to the construction of the story, fails to narrate even a small part of the story although a lot of support is provided, produces only short turns of limited length.	
	3-4	1.5-3	...-1.5	
Fluency	Can speak coherently and clearly with few intrusive hesitations.	Speaks hesitantly with pauses.	Fragmentary speech and incomplete sentences impede communication.	
Accuracy	A fairly wide range of structures and vocabulary, errors minimal in number and gravity, communication of the message is achieved.	Limited vocabulary, structures with little variety, frequent errors that do not prevent communication of the essential message.	Use of only basic vocabulary and structures that may render communication of the message difficult.	
Interactive communication	Initiates discussion, listens to his/her partner's contribution, prompts his/her partner, is co-operative and polite.	Difficulties in turn-taking, limited evidence of co-operation, is not always polite.	Monopolizes the dialogue, no turn-taking, no signs of co-operation, impolite.	
Total				

Appendix IV

Task 4 Student's name: Date:		
<i>Self-assessment Report</i>		Circle your score (1=not good, 2=good, 3=very good, 4= excellent)
1	My pronunciation was correct and my intonation was appropriate.	1 2 3 4
2	My interpretation of the picture was credible, I contributed to the construction of the story equally, I narrated my part of the story successfully, my story was quite interesting.	1 2 3 4
3	I spoke clearly without pauses.	1 2 3 4
4	I used a variety of expressions correctly and made few grammar errors	1 2 3 4
5	While constructing the story with my partner, I spoke when I had to, listened to him / her and tried to help him / her understand me when I spoke.	1 2 3 4
Total		

- How do I feel about my performance on this task?
- Have I ever narrated a story before?
- What were my strong points?
- What were my weak points?
- What should I try to improve in the future?

Appendix V

Optional Task Report

Dear Teacher,
What you are going to listen to is a / an _____ _____ _____.
When I recorded it, I was alone / with _____ at _____ _____.
I selected to record this type of speaking experience because _____ _____ _____.
This recording shows that I can _____ _____ _____.
I feel that my performance was _____ _____ _____.
In the future, I need to improve _____ _____ _____.

Appendix VI

Dear Student,

Now that you have completed your portfolio, I would like you to answer the following questions anonymously. Please, be sincere as your answers will help me to improve our lessons.

1. (Please tick)

Has your portfolio helped you to...	Yes	No
1. realize your strengths?		
2. realize your weaknesses?		
3. focus your study on your weak points?		
4. gain more confidence in your speaking skills?		
5. become well-organised?		
6. become more responsible about your study and learning?		
7. become more interested in the English language lesson?		

Other _____

2. (Please tick)

The portfolio is		than a traditional test.	Yes	No
	more difficult			
	more interesting			
	fairer			
	more useful			
	less stressful			
	more helpful			

Other _____

3. (Please tick)

The core tasks	Yes	No
1. should be conducted in front of the whole class.		
2. were guiding and interesting.		
3. were a stressful experience.		
4. were a tiring experience.		

Other _____

4. (Please tick)

Having the opportunity to self-assess your performance	Yes	No
1. is fair.		
2. motivates you to study more.		
3. makes you think about your strengths and weaknesses.		

Other _____

5. (Please tick)

Were the conferences	Yes	No
1. pleasant?		
2. stressful?		
3. interesting?		
4. tiring?		
5. helpful?		
6. a chance for better co-operation with your teacher?		

6. (Please tick)

The optional tasks	Yes	No
1. were a good opportunity to show your teacher what you can do outside the classroom.		
2. were difficult to record.		
3. were a challenging experience.		
4. were difficult to design.		

7. (Please tick)

The self-assessment and optional tasks reports were	Yes	No
1. guiding.		
2. easy to fill in.		

Finally, would you like to be assessed with a portfolio again? (Please tick)

Yes No

Thank you for your co-operation!

Your Teacher