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Documenting teaching anecdotes for reflective teaching: The case with postgraduate students exploring teaching portfolio

Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz*, Noor Aida Mahmor, Mohan Rathakrishnan & Nurahimah Mohd Yusoff

School of Education, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah.

Article Info	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: 25 July 2023 Revised: 6 August 2023 Accepted: 24 August 2023 Published: 1 September 2023</p> <p>Keywords: Teaching portfolio, Postgraduate student teachers, Case study, Reflective teaching</p> <p></p>	<p>The use of teaching portfolios to document, assess, and improve teaching effectiveness is encouraged in Malaysia. However, postgraduate student teachers struggle to develop an effective teaching portfolio due to difficulties in reflecting on their teaching experiences, selecting relevant evidence, and identifying areas for improvement. This study used a case study methodology to explore the struggles faced by 12 postgraduate student teachers in developing their teaching portfolios and propose ways to make the portfolio more effective. The struggles faced by postgraduate student teachers in developing their teaching portfolio include difficulty in reflecting on their practice, concerns about the privacy of sharing the portfolio, and language and content understanding barriers. To make the portfolio more effective, the study suggests designing a collaborative portfolio and demonstrating diversity and inclusion. Developing a portfolio, engaging in self-reflection, and maintaining an open and curious mindset are crucial for postgraduate students to identify areas for improvement and enhance their effectiveness as educators. Overall, the study highlights the importance of teaching portfolios in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning and provides valuable insights for postgraduate student teachers in Malaysia and beyond.</p>

Corresponding Author:

*Muhammad Noor Abdul Aziz,
School of Education, Universiti Utara Malaysia, Sintok, Kedah, Malaysia.
Email: matno@uum.edu.my



INTRODUCTION

As the landscape of education continues to evolve, the role of teachers has become increasingly complex and multifaceted. As a result, the need for teachers to document their professional growth and showcase their expertise has become more important than ever (Hobbs & Coiro, 2019). Teaching portfolios have become increasingly popular worldwide as a means of documenting, assessing, and improving teaching effectiveness (Harrison et al., 2022). The use of portfolios in higher education has gained momentum over the past few decades as institutions have sought to evaluate and enhance teaching practices, provide evidence of teaching accomplishments, and support professional development for faculty. The origin of teaching portfolios can be traced back to the early 1980s, when they were first introduced as a tool for self-reflection and professional growth in the field of education. Since then, their use has expanded to include a wide range of disciplines, from science and engineering to social sciences and humanities. Today, teaching portfolios are used in universities, colleges, and other higher education institutions around the world. One of the primary purposes of a teaching portfolio is to provide evidence of teaching effectiveness (Chye et al., 2019). Faculty members are often required to demonstrate their teaching accomplishments and their ability to promote student learning. This evidence can be used to support decisions related to promotion, tenure, and other career advancements. Additionally, it can help institutions to identify areas where faculty may need additional support or training. The use of teaching portfolios in Malaysian education has gained significant attention in recent years. In Malaysia, the portfolio is used as a means of professional development and assessment for teachers (Arumugham, 2019). The Ministry of Education Malaysia encourages teachers to create and maintain their teaching portfolios to reflect on their teaching practices and to display their achievements. The use of teaching portfolios is seen as a way to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and to ensure that teachers are constantly improving their skills and knowledge (Harun et al., 2021).

Having and developing an effective teaching portfolio is essential for postgraduate student teachers as it serves as evidence of their teaching abilities and accomplishments. However, the literature informs us that postgraduate student teachers may not have enough evidence to demonstrate their teaching abilities without an effective teaching portfolio (Razali et al., 2021). This can make it difficult for them to secure teaching positions or progress in their careers. Next, it is also a great concern that postgraduate student teachers have difficulty in writing reflection (Henriksen et al., 2020). Since reflection is an essential component of teaching, and an effective teaching portfolio should demonstrate a teacher's ability to reflect on their practice, postgraduate student teachers struggle to reflect on their teaching experiences (David & Hill, 2021) and identify areas for improvement (David & Hill, 2021). Subsequently, postgraduate students face difficulty selecting relevant evidence to include in their portfolio (Guangul et al., 2020). They struggle to identify the most significant experiences and reflections on their professional growth and development.

To address these issues, it is essential to explore the struggles faced by postgraduate student teachers in materializing their teaching portfolio and propose ways in making the portfolio more effective. The study will be exploring evidence of their teaching abilities, reflections on their practice, and documentation of their achievements and experiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

REFLECTIVE TEACHING

Reflective teaching is a process of reflecting on one's own teaching practices and experiences to enhance teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes (Cirocki & Widodo, 2019). It involves a conscious and intentional examination of one's own assumptions, beliefs, values, and practices and how they impact teaching and learning. Reflective practice encourages postgraduate student teachers to identify areas of strength and weakness in their teaching (Lombardi et al., 2021), to develop strategies to improve their teaching (Shaukat et al., 2019), and to assess the impact of their teaching on student learning (Andrade, 2019). One of the many benefits of reflective practice is its ability to aid in developing a teaching portfolio (Gudeta, 2022; Machost & Stains, 2023). One way reflective practice helps develop a teaching portfolio is by providing teachers with a rich source of evidence. Through reflective practice, student teachers can gather data and information about their teaching practices, student learning, and professional development (Aslan et al., 2022). This information

can be used to create a wide range of artifacts for a teaching portfolio, such as lesson plans, assessments, student work samples, and reflections on teaching experiences. These artefacts showcase a student teacher's ability to reflect on their teaching practices and how they impact student learning.

Reflective practice also helps postgraduate teachers to identify their teaching strengths and areas for improvement (Di Silvestro & Nadir, 2021). By analyzing their teaching practices, they can recognize what is working well and what needs to be modified or improved. This self-awareness enables teachers to focus on their strengths and address their weaknesses, essential for creating a teaching portfolio that highlights their abilities as an educator (Gutiérrez-Santiuste et al., 2022). In addition to providing evidence and identifying areas for improvement, reflective practice helps student teachers to articulate their teaching philosophy and goals. A teaching portfolio should include a statement of teaching philosophy, which outlines a teacher's beliefs about teaching and learning (Winberg, 2022). Reflective practice enables teachers to develop a clear and concise philosophy that aligns with their teaching practices and goals. It also helps them articulate their teaching goals and objectives, essential for creating a comprehensive teaching portfolio.

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Teaching portfolios can also be a valuable tool for institutions. By requiring postgraduate students to create portfolios, institutions can encourage a culture of continuous improvement in teaching (Simonson et al., 2022). They can also use the portfolios to identify trends and patterns in teaching effectiveness across departments and to support institutional accreditation efforts.

Creating a teaching portfolio requires students to reflect on their teaching experience and practice (Hamilton, 2019). This can help them identify their strengths and weaknesses, set goals for improvement, and refine their teaching philosophy. Besides, a teaching portfolio can help postgraduate students stand out in a competitive job market. It demonstrates their commitment to teaching and provides evidence of their teaching effectiveness to potential employers (Tang, 2019). In addition, building a teaching portfolio can be an opportunity for professional development. It can help postgraduate students develop teaching, assessment, and reflective practice skills (Beka & Kulinxha, 2021; Nurkamto & Sarosa, 2020). Consequently, a teaching portfolio provides evidence of a postgraduate student's teaching effectiveness. This can be particularly important for promotion and tenure decisions.

As much as a teaching portfolio brings benefits to postgraduate students, creating a teaching portfolio can be a time-consuming process. It requires students to collect and organize a range of documents and artefacts, and to reflect on their teaching experience and practice (Francis & Kaur, 2019). Postgraduate students may be uncertain about the expectations for a teaching portfolio, particularly if they have not had much teaching experience (Rattiya et al., 2022). They may need guidance from their advisors or mentors on what to include and how to structure the portfolio. To further aggravate the issue, postgraduate students may have limited teaching experience, particularly if they are in the early stages of their program (Henriksen et al., 2020). This can make it challenging to create a comprehensive teaching portfolio and since evaluating teaching effectiveness can be subjective, and the evidence presented in a teaching portfolio may be open to interpretation, postgraduate students may need to consider how to present their evidence clearly and objectively.

METHODOLOGY

The case study methodology (Yin, 2014) used in this study involved selecting 12 postgraduate teachers from a single institution of higher education. The selection criteria were based on the teachers' experience in developing a teaching portfolio at their respective schools and their willingness to participate in the study (Cruzes et al., 2014). The data collection process involved qualitative methods, including interviews and document analysis. The data collection process began after obtaining volunteering consent (Byrne, 2001) from the twelve participants. An initial interview with each teacher to gather information about their teaching practices and their experience developing a portfolio was conducted. This interview protocol which was adapted from Hamilton (2019) and Beka and (Kulinxha, 2021) was used to probe into the struggles and challenges faced by the students in developing their teaching philosophy, their approach to teaching, and their

instructional strategies. Following the initial interview, a document analysis of each teacher's teaching portfolio was conducted. The teaching portfolio included lesson plans, syllabi, student work samples, and other materials that provided evidence of the teacher's teaching practices as well as their weekly reflections. The data collected from the interviews and document analysis were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The data were analyzed by identifying recurring themes and patterns in the data, which were then used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' teaching practices. When conducting a qualitative case study with postgraduate student teachers who develop their teaching portfolio, using pseudonyms can help protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants (Allen & Wiles, 2016). As such, the real names of the participants in this study were not revealed.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Three themes emerged for the struggle faced by the participants and three themes were deduced for the second research question which navigated to the suggestions to make the development of the portfolio more effective for future postgraduate students.

STRUGGLE FACED BY POSTGRADUATE STUDENT TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING THEIR TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Theme 1: Difficulty in reflecting on their practice

All the participants unanimously agreed that struggle in reflecting on their own teaching activities due to lacking in critical thinking abilities.

“I really can't see what is good in my teaching” (Interview P4)

“Reflection is important but at times I don't know if what I write is helpful for me” (Interview P9)

“Class went well but I think students need more help in solving the sums. I am stuck, I don't know who to guide first as many have different problems.” (Reflection P6)

It is evident that the students need a guideline in reflecting their teaching activities to ensure quality teaching can be materialized.

There are also students who highlighted that while embarking on reflection writing, they would usually get distracted and had difficulty getting back to their reflection.

“It was difficult for me to focus on the reflection writing because I have lots of other work to do. As a result, I write the standard template that says objective is achieved.” (Interview P7)

“No reflection was written for 4 classes consecutively”(Lesson Plan 13 P2)

“(incomplete reflection – Class was quite...)”(Lesson Plan 5, P12)

It was quite disturbing to see postgraduate student teachers not being able to spend quality time reflecting their teaching activities to make improvisation for future lessons.

THEME 2: CONCERN ON THE PRIVACY OF SHARING THE PORTFOLIO

When the postgraduate students were asked on the content selection for their portfolio, almost 70% of them felt that the portfolio is a personal document that cannot be shared with others as it records their failures too.

“I don't think I can share everything about the portfolio to my colleagues because it is my private file.” (Interview P8)

“The portfolio can be shared to only my administration and lecturer, not to others as they can have access to my failed classroom activities and that will embarrassing.”(Reflection P3)

There were also another issue regarding the privacy of sharing the portfolio in relation to the requirement by the Ministry of Education.

“*KPM* (the ministry) already gave us MyPortfolio. It is another hassle building this portfolio as I feel redundant work and I don’t want my friends to know what I do because I am not a GC (excellent teacher).” (Interview P1)

“MyPortfolio from *KPM* is a copy paste thing. This portfolio that I did for this study is more meaningful but I am shy to share because others have better ones. (Interview P9)

The students were not ready to share because they felt that they still lacked content that was worth sharing.

THEME 3: LANGUAGE AND CONTENT UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS

It was shocking to hear from the students that their lack of proficiency in the English language was a struggle in their preparation of the portfolio.

“I am not good in English. So, when I read, I take a longer time to understand and take action.” (Interview P5)

“English language is difficult. I don’t know how to understand what I do and the task is quite difficult because I am poor in English.” (Reflection P11)

It was evident from their portfolio that some of the postgraduate students teachers made glaring grammatical and structural errors in the elaboration of activities and other write-ups.

Apart from language, it was also noticeable that five of them did not understand partially the content of what they teach because from their snapshots of photos and lesson plans, it could be deduced that they were wrong.

SUGGESTIONS TO MAKE THE PORTFOLIO MORE MEANINGFUL FOR FUTURE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT TEACHERS

THEME 1: DESIGN A COLLABORATIVE PORTFOLIO

Five students suggested that since many of them found it burdensome to create individual portfolios, they could actually prepare a shared portfolio with a classmate from the same field of teaching subjects.

“I think it will be good if we can have a shared portfolio so that the burden can be reduced.” (Interview P6)

“I don’t mind working with my classmate to build one portfolio only but has collection of both our works. We can work together and make it better. (Interview P10)

“Shared portfolio can be a good idea. It will lessen our burden and we can discuss with our partner.”(Interview P3)

The students felt that when working together with their friend would alleviate the quality of the portfolio.

THEME 2: DEMONSTRATE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

When asked on how to make their portfolio special and meaningful, the students suggested that they include the collection of best lesson samples for reference and sharing purpose.

“We can add in our best lesson plans and teaching activities that had successfully engaged students.” (Interview P7)

“Can add in innovation to make the portfolio different from others.” (Interview P4)

“Digital portfolio is better so that editing becomes easy” (Reflection P11)

The participants also suggested that they incorporated diverse perspectives and experiences into their teaching, as well as how they have adapted their teaching to meet the needs of different learners with series of guided reflection from their supervisors.

“Feedback from supervisors were needed to enhance the development of an effective portfolio.” (Interview P5)

“Perspectives from friends can also be included so that the portfolio becomes holistic.” (Interview P8)

In simple, participants experienced that by portraying inclusivity in their portfolio, their work becomes more critical, and the quality can be enhanced.

Maintaining a portfolio is an essential part of reflecting on one's practice in education. It allows professionals to track teachers' progress, identify areas of strength and weakness, and make improvements in their work. One of the main difficulties postgraduate students face is difficulty reflecting on their practice objectively. It can be challenging to assess one's work critically, identify areas for improvement, and set goals for growth. Self-reflection requires individuals to be honest and introspective, which can be uncomfortable and even intimidating (Syzykova et al., 2021). Self-reflection is a crucial aspect of postgraduate studies, as it allows students to evaluate their work critically and objectively. The findings suggest that many students struggle with self-doubt and anxiety, which can make it difficult to assess their progress accurately. It is essential to approach self-reflection with an open and curious mindset, allowing oneself to explore their work with an objective eye. This process can help identify strengths and weaknesses and provide a path for growth (Beka & Kulinxha, 2021; Martin et al., 2019).

The fear of making mistakes and the pressure to perform at a high level can make self-reflection uncomfortable and intimidating. However, it is essential to note that self-reflection is a vital part of the learning process. Without it, postgraduate student teachers may struggle to identify areas for improvement and develop a growth mindset. Moreover, self-reflection can provide valuable insights into one's own learning style and preferences (Agustuna et al., 2019). It can help individuals develop the necessary skills to evaluate their work critically, allowing them to identify areas for growth and set achievable goals. Self-reflection is a skill that can be developed with practice. It is crucial for postgraduate student teachers to approach the process with a growth mindset, recognizing that reflection is a journey rather than a destination. Developing a habit of reflecting on their work regularly can help students overcome the initial discomfort of self-reflection and make it a more natural and comfortable process (Sweet, 2022). With time and practice, students can become more objective in their self-assessment and identify areas for growth, leading to a more successful postgraduate experience.

Another challenge that was highlighted in the findings revolves around the issue of content selection for portfolios that becomes a great concern for postgraduate students. As the findings suggest, almost 70% of the students feel that their portfolio is a personal document that cannot be shared. This raises important questions about the role of portfolios in education and the importance of acknowledging failures and mistakes as a part of the learning process. Portfolios are meant to be a reflective and developmental tool, enabling students to document their learning, set goals, and demonstrate their progress. However, if students perceive portfolios as a personal document that cannot be shared with others, it undermines the purpose of the portfolio as a tool for

self-reflection and growth. It is important to recognize that the process of self-reflection and self-assessment involves acknowledging both successes and failures (Martincova et al., 2021). In fact, mistakes and failures are an integral part of the learning process, and it is through reflection on these experiences that students can identify areas for improvement and set goals for growth. It is imperative that educators create a safe and supportive learning environment that encourages students to be open and honest about their learning experiences, including their failures (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). By doing so, students can feel more comfortable sharing their portfolios with others, including instructors, peers, and potential employers. Additionally, by sharing their portfolios, students can receive feedback and support to help them identify areas for growth and improvement.

In today's globalized world, mastering English language proficiency is considered a fundamental skill in almost every field of work, including education. Proficiency in English is essential for students, especially those who pursue higher education or aspire to work in multinational companies. As English is the dominant language in academia, it is not surprising that students who lack proficiency in English may find it challenging to express their ideas effectively in the portfolio. Research has shown that the lack of English proficiency can lead to several negative consequences for students. For instance, students who struggle with English may experience lower academic achievement, decreased self-esteem, and limited social and cultural opportunities (Courtney, 2017, Sodbir, 2012). Furthermore, English proficiency is also critical for students to participate in academic and social activities, access educational resources, and communicate with instructors and peers effectively. To address this issue, institutions must provide students with adequate support and resources to improve their English proficiency (Marcum & Kim, 2020). This support may include language classes, tutoring, and other language-learning programs that focus on developing reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Moreover, instructors and institutions must also provide students with feedback and guidance to help them improve their writing skills and communicate their ideas effectively.

The suggestion made by the five students to prepare a shared portfolio with a classmate from the same field of teaching subjects is an interesting finding that can have several benefits for students. First, creating a shared portfolio can reduce the burden on individual students, as they can work collaboratively to complete the portfolio. Second, it can facilitate peer learning, where students can share their knowledge and skills with each other, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Finally, it can promote teamwork and communication skills, which are essential skills in today's work environment. However, creating a shared portfolio also has its challenges. First, it may be challenging to ensure that each student contributes equally to the portfolio. Second, students may have different learning styles and approaches, which may lead to disagreements or misunderstandings in the collaborative process. Third, creating a shared portfolio may limit students' ability to express their individuality and creativity, as they may need to compromise and collaborate with their classmates. To overcome these challenges, it is essential to establish clear guidelines and expectations for the creation of a shared portfolio (Trammell & Laforge, 2017). For instance, instructors may assign specific tasks and responsibilities to each student and provide feedback and guidance throughout the process. Students may also need to communicate effectively, establish mutual respect and trust, and resolve conflicts constructively.

Subsequently, the incorporation of diverse perspectives and experiences into teaching is a critical aspect of creating an inclusive and equitable learning environment. By incorporating diverse perspectives, students can gain a broader understanding of the subject matter and learn to appreciate and respect different viewpoints. Moreover, adapting teaching to meet the needs of different learners is also essential, as it ensures that all students can access and engage with the learning materials (Aydin et al., 2017). It behooves us to acknowledge the salient fact that incorporating diverse perspectives and adapting teaching to meet the needs of different learners is not a one-time effort but an ongoing process. Teachers must continuously reflect on their teaching practices and adjust to ensure that they are meeting the needs of all learners. This requires a commitment to ongoing professional development, self-reflection, and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors. Furthermore, it is also important to recognize that incorporating diverse perspectives and adapting teaching to meet the needs of different learners is not a panacea for all educational challenges (Singh et al., 2021). Teachers must also address other factors that contribute to educational inequities, such as systemic racism, poverty, and unequal access to educational resources. As such, incorporating diverse perspectives and adapting teaching to meet the needs of different learners is an essential aspect of creating an inclusive and equitable learning

environment. It may require commitment to ongoing professional development and collaboration with colleagues and supervisors.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Developing, maintaining a portfolio and engaging in self-reflection are vital aspects of professional development in education. Postgraduate students may face challenges in reflecting on their practice objectively due to self-doubt and anxiety, but an open and curious mindset can facilitate the process of identifying areas for improvement and setting goals for growth. By engaging in self-reflection, educators can continuously improve their practice and enhance their effectiveness in the classroom. Future research can be tailored into investigating collaborative learning is promoted through peer observations, fostering diverse perspectives and constructive feedback exchange. Integrating video recordings into reflection enables objective evaluation of teaching styles and interactions. Engagement in professional development workshops, seminars, and mentorship provides exposure to innovative teaching methods and current research, driving continuous self-assessment and skill integration. A technology-oriented approach and collaborative engagement create an environment conducive to holistic growth. These strategies empower student teachers to overcome self-doubt, enhance reflective skills, and establish a firm foundation for improved classroom performance.

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