



## Enhancing EFL Academic Writing through E-Portfolios: An Assessment for Learning Approach in Higher Education

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examines the use of e-portfolios as an assessment for learning approach to improve academic writing in English as a foreign language and explores students' perceptions of this method. The study involved 30 first-year university students in Vietnam. A mixed-methods design was used, including a writing pretest and posttest assessed across task achievement, organization, vocabulary, and grammar, along with interviews. The results showed clear improvement in overall writing performance, especially in task achievement and grammar, with moderate gains in organization and vocabulary. Students reported that e-portfolios helped them reflect on their work, track progress, and take more responsibility for learning. Despite some initial challenges with reflection and peer feedback, students viewed the approach positively. Overall, e-portfolios are an effective tool to support writing development through continuous practice and feedback.

**KEYWORDS:** e-portfolio, assessment for learning (AfL), academic writing, EFL context, technology-enhanced learning.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English is widely considered one of the most dominant languages, and it is taught in educational organizations worldwide (Crystal, 2003; Jenkins, 2006). However, the more global the language becomes, the more challenging it becomes for those who learn it as a foreign language. The increasing standards of English proficiency place EFL learners who lack a supportive learning environment and encouragement under considerable pressure. Particularly, EFL students usually experience difficulties in developing productive skills, especially with writing and speaking (Nation, 2001; Swain, 1985). Unlike receptive skills such as reading and listening, productive skills require not only sufficient input but also the ability to transform the input into meaningful output. However, Hinkel (2006) notes that instead of utilizing reading and listening to create input for writing and speaking, in many educational contexts, these two major skill sets are treated separately rather than in an integrated manner. Furthermore, Hyland (2003) asserts that writing skill integrates multiple components, including language use, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and cohesion. Among those criteria, according to Crossley and McNamara (2010), coherence and cohesion are strong indicators associated with writing quality. Besides, even when EFL students meet these linguistic criteria, they also have to possess standard content knowledge, reasoning ability, and critical thinking skills to produce persuasive and well-structured essays (Flower & Hayes, 1981; Kellogg, 2008). This highlights the key role of teachers who are facilitators, providing students with scaffolding for brainstorming and idea organization at the very first step (Vygotsky, 1978; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). On the other hand, providing ideas is not the only role teachers play in supporting EFL learners. Moreover, in the writing process, students may encounter countless other problems, both academically and mentally. Some students may feel pressured when they are not confident in their ideas. Moreover, some students may keep making grammatical mistakes, while others keep having trouble with overly informal or simplistic vocabulary. Others may struggle to avoid overly lengthy, wordy, insufficient reasoning writing. Therefore, without comments and feedback from experienced instructors, students may continue to reproduce their fossilized errors (Selinker, 1972). Some students may feel quite frustrated when they receive detailed or comprehensive feedback from their teachers, which creates an automatic acceptance without any judgment. In learning productive skills, it is highly recommended that learners adopt learned language that is meaningful to them. Therefore, peer feedback can enhance and encourage learning better since learners tend to benefit cognitively more from evaluating and receiving comments from others (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009). To address those above concerns, e-portfolios appear to be a suitable approach, which creates space for self-practice, self-regulation, reflection, and continuous improvement (Cheng & Chau, 2013). Moreover, Lam (2018) also adds that digital tools, including e-portfolios, can create a supportive and encouraging learning environment. This helps provide EFL learners with valuable chances to develop their writing competence. Although numerous



studies have been conducted about the benefits of e-portfolios and formative assessment in language learning, there is limited empirical research on the effectiveness of applying e-portfolios as a tool for assessment in tertiary EFL writing classrooms, especially in the Vietnamese context. Furthermore, employing standardized writing criteria such as IELTS-based rubrics is very rare, since it helps quantitatively measure writing development through integration of e-portfolios (IELTS, 2023). To address this gap, the present study examines how the implementation of e-portfolios as a formative assessment in developing university EFL learners' academic writing performance and explores students' perceptions toward this instructional approach.

This current study is guided by the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does the use of e-portfolios as an Assessment for Learning (AfL) tool help enhance EFL students' academic writing performance?
2. How do EFL students perceive the use of e-portfolios in supporting their writing development?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction to E-Portfolio in Language Learning

Portfolios have long been used as a tool for learning in some school projects, which also functions as a place to save students' assignments or mini projects throughout their course. Traditionally, paper-based portfolios have been employed as an effective way to help students store and track their learning, and this tool has been widely used with all levels, ranging from primary to university level. However, sometimes, paper-based portfolios have some limitations and can be discouraging since they require a high level of meticulousness, organization, and time management. They are also vulnerable to unfavorable weather conditions such as heavy rain, high humidity, or the collection could be lost somewhere if not managed well. Technology has become an integral part of modern life, and education is no exception. However, despite its widespread adoption, some educational organizations remain hesitant to fully implement e-portfolios due to limitations in technical infrastructure, increased staff workload, and the need for systematic management, training, and institutional support (Hallam et al., 2008; Strivens, 2007). Nevertheless, research consistently highlights the pedagogical advantages of e-portfolios. According to the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2011), e-portfolios demonstrate notable strengths over conventional formats, including flexibility, ease of access, sustainability, and enhanced visibility for both lecturers and peers. Similarly, Barrett (2007) emphasizes that e-portfolios enhance learner engagement, nurture reflection, and promote a higher level of learning ownership. In addition, e-portfolios provide long-term storage, systematic documentation, and the ability to track students' learning processes. What makes e-portfolio superior to paper-based portfolios is its availability beyond classroom boundaries since it enables continuous interaction and feedback outside the traditional classroom setting (Chau & Cheng, 2010). Additionally, timely feedback further supports engagement and self-regulation, particularly in language learning contexts (Lam, 2014). This allows continuous practice, helping maintain learners' interest in learning, and contributing to learning autonomy. Given these advantages, various platforms have been introduced to maximize learning outcomes. In educational contexts, e-portfolio systems have been used widely through various platforms, including Google Sites and Drive, Padlet, Canvas Portfolios, and Microsoft OneNote Class Notebook. In general, these platforms provide learners with greater access to learning resources, improved interaction, and enhanced creativity. Importantly, students today, especially younger learners, are exposed to digital technologies from an early age and tend to prefer online and interactive modes of communication. Therefore, to accommodate the increasing technological needs of university students growing up in a technology-driven world, it is essential to transition from paper-based portfolios to electronic portfolios as an assessment tool (Ngu, Pang, & Hiew, 2020). In this sense, e-portfolios not only address the limitations of traditional formats but also align with students' digital preferences. However, e-portfolios are not a one-size-fits-all solution. According to Barrett (2007), they can be classified into three main dimensions: formative (for learning), summative (for assessment), and showcase portfolios. Consequently, not all types are equally suitable for tertiary educational contexts, and careful pedagogical consideration is required when selecting an appropriate model. Therefore, teachers should carefully select the type of e-portfolio that satisfies specific instructional objectives, assessment purposes, and also learners' styles and characteristics. Ngu, Pang, and Hiew (2020) emphasize that the use of technological platforms should be meticulous and context-sensitive, as learners' needs are greatly affected by educational contexts. As a result, it is widely acknowledged that the successful implementation of e-portfolios in tertiary language classrooms depends not only on technological adoption, but it is also on thoughtful pedagogical planning.



## 2.2. Importance of E-portfolios in language learning in the university context

As students increasingly prefer online tools and interactive platforms in their daily lives, whether for entertainment, communication, or work, integrating e-portfolios into education helps align learning with their digital lifestyles. Moreover, students may enter university with varying levels of language competence, partly resulting from previous failure or low achievement, which can negatively influence their motivation later (Dörnyei, 2001). Furthermore, in language learning, without sufficient encouragement from teachers and peers, learners may feel discouraged when completing language-related assignments independently. Therefore, Ushioda (2011) suggests the need for social support to create the strong link that helps improve self-identity, from both teachers and peers. Moreover, e-portfolios are not only a tool to switch due to modern lifestyles or a tool to enrich learning, but they must also be considered an important supportive pedagogical tool in language learning these days. They provide structured opportunities for learners to track their progress, identify strengths and weaknesses, and monitor improvement over time (Yastibas & Yastibas, 2015). In addition, their interactive features, including commenting, sharing, and collaborative reflection, facilitate peer support and social interaction beyond classroom boundaries (Tosh & Werdmuller, 2004; Chau & Cheng, 2010). Additionally, language learning requires more than a supportive learning environment; it also requires frequent practice with clear guidance and checklists, which play a key role in language learning and teaching. Therefore, e-portfolios create a highly beneficial learning environment, where learners can do their assignments at any time, anywhere, receive feedback, comments, or even reactions, which is similar to what they experience with social media platforms. This helps maintain and enhance learners' engagement, supports the gradual development of linguistic accuracy and self-regulated writing practices. Teachers can also enhance engagement by setting structured tasks, monitoring participation, and providing timely feedback, which promotes sustained involvement and self-regulation (Lam, 2014). In pedagogical focus, e-portfolio also creates opportunities to shift from teacher-centred toward student-centred. According to Duong (2021), e-portfolios have been proven to be beneficial and useful for learners to improve their writing skills, together with the enhancement of learning autonomy through researching materials, goal setting, study planning, reflecting, and exchanging peer feedback. When learning tasks are perceived as personally meaningful and socially supported, students are more willing to participate actively in online platforms (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such engagement gradually transforms learners from passive learners into active researchers in the learning process. Therefore, it emphasizes writing learning as a process, rather than evaluating only through the final product.

## 2.3. Assessment for Learning writing in EFL classrooms

### 2.3.1. Definition and Types of Assessment

Assessment plays a key role in education, as it offers an efficient and systematic way to measure learners' progress and results (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) also add that through assessment, teachers or lecturers can be well informed about students' strengths and weaknesses, and then they can deliver feedback based on students' performance, to guide improvement. Without a systematic assessment, teachers or lecturers may find it hard to help students get on the right track. Bachman & Palmer (2010) clearly state that assessment outcomes could help instructors generate important educational decisions, including placement or progression to higher levels. Teachers have been using a variety of assessment methods to help students in their learning journey. According to Brown & Abeywickrama (2019), assessment is essential in teaching and learning that can be applied in different learning phases. Assessments can be used prior to, during, or even after the learning process for different purposes. Harmer (2007) also adds that assessment can be used both formally and informally in various instructional stages. Brown (2004) suggests that assessment could be divided into several typical types, such as diagnostic or placement (before instruction), formative (during instruction), and summative (after instruction). While formative assessment focuses more on the learning process to provide ongoing feedback, helping students improve their performance, summative assessment places its reliance on final outcomes and the evaluation of learners' overall scores at the end of the course. Diagnostic assessment helps identify learners' existing knowledge, strengths, and weaknesses, which allows teachers to develop instructional planning. In contrast, placement assessment is used to classify students in their appropriate levels or groups based on their proficiency, making sure students in the same groups or levels could understand instructions equally, as well as the learning outcomes fit their learning needs.

### 2.3.2. Difference between Assessment for Learning (AfL) vs. Assessment of Learning (AoL)

Black & Wiliam (1998) emphasize the importance of formative assessment (during instruction) as a key to improvement. In this paper, we employ e-portfolio as a formative assessment tool, where students' improvements are measured and evaluated through peer-feedback, teachers' feedback based on set criteria, and checklists. This approach is called assessment for learning since it is



very process-oriented and learner-centered. It aligns with theories before about the advantages of e-portfolios, which is the efficient replacement for a paper-based tool. While assessment of learning focuses more on final outcomes and certifications (Harlen & James, 1997), it does not comprehensively assess the whole process of improvement and changes from learners as formative assessment.

### 2.3.3. Role of Formative Assessment in EFL Writing

Brown (2004) points out that productive skills such as speaking and writing require performance-based assessment. In EFL classes, formative assessment is more suitable for speaking and writing because learners' performance and their changes can be observed over time. Moreover, Hyland (2003) highlights the role of formative assessment in writing in terms of supporting drafting and redrafting. He also claims that writing is a process; therefore, revision and feedback are essential. To compare with other language dimensions, writing is normally considered one of the most challenging for EFL learners (Richards & Renandya, 2002). This skill requires more discipline and effort, since without in-time intervention and feedback, students are unable to recognize their slips and therefore, struggle with the same points until the end of the course. Ferris (2003) claims that if students do not receive corrective feedback, they tend to repeat and fossilize their errors. Additionally, Bitchener and Ferris (2012) also add that timely feedback also prevents the risk of long-term error retention. Moreover, writing is a complex and multi-dimensional skill which requires good management of diverse components such as lexical resources, register (formal or informal), coherence, grammar, ideas, etc. at the same time (Hyland, 2003; Brown, 2004). These criteria should be used skilfully in an essay as a multi-skilled task to produce a readable, standardized essay. Moreover, learners may find it hard to self-evaluate their own essay objectively, based on these criteria, which requires external perspectives and comments; they need external feedback to develop the ability of self-assessment (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Sadler, 1989). Additionally, to improve writing skills, students not only need to practice frequently, but they also need continuous feedback from teachers and peers (Black & Wiliam, 1998). Moreover, EFL learners usually face some difficulties, especially in productive skills. Krashen (1985) assumes that language acquisition requires an extensive amount of input, and it is even more challenging for EFL writers to master the skill due to limited linguistic exposure (Silva, 1993). Since EFL students have different grammatical systems, lexical resources, and different ways of thinking in their own mother tongue compared to English as a foreign language. Some students even get stuck on translating what they think from their first language. Among writing criteria, coherence and cohesion appear to be abstract to learners, and they are not usually overtly marked (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Additionally, coherence is considered the invisible aspect that Crossley and McNamara (2010) claim that this criterion is very challenging to measure and often implicit. As a result, continuous corrective feedback from formative assessment could greatly benefit learners in EFL classes in building and enhancing their writing skills. Formative assessment in EFL writing helps both learners and teachers. With learners, the assessment allows students to realize their areas for improvements at a very early stage, then they have opportunities to improve those areas in subsequent tasks. Black and Wiliam (1998) emphasize that formative assessment could be employed as a very systematic way to monitor students' progress while the learning process is ongoing, allowing chances for timely adjustments. Moreover, formative assessment can go beyond correcting errors, since this kind of assessment also aims at providing students with sufficient information that helps them monitor and regulate their own learning (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Bachman and Palmer (2010) argue that formative assessment provides assessment outcomes, which could be the most powerful tool for teachers and lecturers to make informed educational decisions in a more pedagogical and cooperative approach. In writing, it is very understandable that each student may suffer from unique problems that need immediate adjustment at a very early step. Therefore, teachers should help students realize and overcome what they may struggle with at an early stage; otherwise, it may negatively affect learning motivation (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Additionally, Black and Wiliam (1998) assert that formative assessment enhances teacher-student interaction through comments and feedback. This assessment also creates trust in their students in the way their instructors guide them (Carless, 2015). Finally, according to Wiliam (2011), formative assessment also helps create a safe learning environment, where students may not feel shy or afraid of being criticized or losing face. To sum up, e-portfolios provide various chances to improve L2 writing development through fostering a sustained level of engagement, focusing on process-oriented learning, offering personalized interaction, and offering transparent assessment practices.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research design

This study followed a sequential mixed-methods design, in which the qualitative phase was designed to interpret and provide deeper insights into the initial quantitative results (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Since the study was conducted with a pre-existing class in a mandatory course, meaning that it is not feasible to form a separate control group. Therefore, a quasi-experimental design was adopted due to this constraint (Gopalan et al., 2020). The research was carried out in two phases of data collection over the course of one semester. In the first phase, a quasi-experimental one-group pretest–posttest design was used within an academic writing module where students used an e-portfolio as an Assessment-for-Learning (AfL) tool. Students were required to complete a pretest at the start of the module and a posttest after the module ends. A standardized rubric was utilized by two independent raters to assess their performances. In the second phase of the study, five students were chosen randomly to participate in semi-structured interviews. By investigating students' perceptions of the e-portfolio, this phase helped to explain the quantitative findings.

#### 3.2 Participants

The participants of the study consisted of 30 first-year undergraduates. All participants were non-English major students enrolling in an academic writing course at a Vietnamese university. The course was part of the formal curriculum, aiming to develop students' academic writing skills over one semester. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students were informed that their involvement would include both the research components and the use of e-portfolios as part of their learning process.

#### 3.3. Procedure

The Academic Writing course was conducted over 15 sessions, with each session lasting 90 minutes. At the outset of the study, students completed a standardized pretest during the first session. They were subsequently introduced to the course and received training on how to use the e-portfolio. From session 2 to session 13, writing classes were delivered with the focus on different academic essay genres, including opinion, discussion, problem-solution, cause-effect essays. E-portfolio served as a platform for students to record their writing drafts, give peer and self-feedback, revise their work, and write reflections on what they have learnt in every session. In session 14, all students were required to complete a standardized posttest. The pretest and posttest results were compared to evaluate the impact of e-portfolio as a tool for Assessment for Learning on students' academic writing performance. Finally, in session 15, five students were randomly selected to participate in semi-structured interviews to explore their perceptions of the e-portfolio. The integration of quantitative pre/posttest results with qualitative insights from the interviews provided a comprehensible understanding of both the effectiveness of the e-portfolio as an Assessment for Learning tool and students' experiences of using it. Throughout the course, students engaged in repeated AfL cycles with the e-portfolio, which allowed them to reflect on their own progress and subsequently improve their writing. The timeline of the 15 sessions is presented in

**Table 1. Teaching procedure**

Session	Activities	Focus / Notes	Data Collected
1	Introduction & Pretest	Pretest + e-portfolio training	Pretest essays, baseline survey
2–4	Writing Lessons & Practice	Opinion & discussion essays; AfL cycles	Draft essays, peer feedback, reflections, e-portfolio logs
5–7	Writing Lessons & Practice	Revision & problem–solution essays; AfL cycles	Revised drafts, peer/self-assessment, reflections
8–10	Writing Lessons & Practice	Cause–effect & advantages/disadvantages essays; AfL cycles	Drafts, revisions, feedback logs, reflections
11–13	Writing Lessons & Practice	Mixed essay types, focused practice on cohesion, vocabulary, grammar	Drafts, revisions, peer feedback, reflections, e-portfolio logs
14	Posttest	Timed essay, same conditions as pretest	Posttest essays
15	Reflection & Interviews	Semi-structured interviews with 5 students	Interview transcripts



### 3.4. Data Collection Instruments

To examine the impact of using an e-portfolio as an Assessment-for-Learning (AFL) tool on students' academic writing, pretest and posttest essays were used as the primary quantitative instruments. In both tests, students were required to write an essay in the same academic genre, with a similar level of difficulty. Students' essays were assessed using the IELTS Writing Task 2 band descriptors, on four criteria including task response, coherence and cohesion, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy. Each aspect was rated on a scale from 0 to 9, and the overall score was the mean of the four aspects. The overall band score for each student was calculated as the mean of the four criteria and rounded to the nearest 0.5 to align with standard IELTS scoring practice. To ensure reliability and fairness, each essay was assessed independently by two examiners. After the initial marking, the examiners discussed any discrepancies and reached a final consensus score for each criterion prior to calculating the overall score. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five randomly chosen students to capture their perceptions and experiences when using e-portfolios. All interviews were carried out in Vietnamese, which is students' and researchers' first language, to ensure clear communication. Participants were anonymized (from S1 to S5) to maintain confidentiality.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, pretest and posttest scores were analysed using SPSS30. Scores for each of the four writing criteria and the overall band were summarized using means, standard deviations, and ranges. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to determine whether there was a statistically significant improvement in students' writing performance after the e-portfolio intervention. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied following the six-step procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcripts were first read repeatedly to ensure familiarization with the data. Initial codes were generated openly to capture patterns and notable points in the data. Codes were then grouped into broader themes representing key aspects of students' experiences with the e-portfolio. Finally, the integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed for triangulation, providing a comprehensive understanding of the e-portfolio's effectiveness in supporting academic writing development and highlighting students' experiences and perceptions of the tool. Quantitative results from pretests and posttests offered evidence of performance improvement, while qualitative insights illuminated how and why the e-portfolio facilitated learning and engagement

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

**Table 2** reports the average values for the overall band score and the four subcomponents of academic writing assessed at the pre-test and post-test stages. The descriptive findings reveal a consistent upward trend in mean scores, both for the overall band and for each individual dimension of academic writing.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics for pre-test and post-test scores (n=30)**

Variable	M	SD
Overall band score_pre-test	4.07	0.43
Overall band score_post-test	5.02	0.45
Task response_pre-test	4.00	0.87
Task response_post-test	5.07	0.83
Coherence and cohesion_pre-test	4.07	0.91
Coherence and cohesion_post-test	4.83	0.79
Lexical resources_pre-test	4.17	0.83
Lexical resources_post-test	5.00	0.79
Grammatical range and accuracy_pre-test	4.10	0.76
Grammatical range and accuracy_post-test	4.93	0.69

**Table 3** summarizes the paired-samples t-test results conducted to evaluate the statistical significance of the observed gains. The analysis demonstrated that the mean overall band score at the pre-test was significantly lower than that at the post-test (mean



difference = -0.95,  $p < .001$ ). This suggests that students’ academic writing performance improved markedly over the course when the e-portfolio was utilized as an assessment-for-learning approach.

Additionally, paired-samples t-tests were conducted on the four subscales of academic writing, which demonstrated that the magnitude of statistical significance varied across dimensions. Substantial improvements were observed in task response (mean difference = -1.07,  $p < .001$ ), lexical resources (mean difference = -0.83,  $p = .003$ ), and grammatical range and accuracy (mean difference = -0.83,  $p < .001$ ). Although the gain in coherence and cohesion (mean difference = -0.77,  $p = .001$ ) was comparatively smaller, it remained statistically significant. Overall, the results suggest that students’ English academic writing skills advanced significantly over the semester when the e-portfolio was implemented as a learning-oriented assessment method. The most substantial gains were observed in task response and grammar, while more moderate but meaningful improvements occurred in coherence and cohesion and lexical resources.

**Table 3. Paired-samples t-test results**

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Pre_Overall Post_Overall	-.950	.6740	.1231	-1.2017	-.6983	-7.720	29	.000
Pair 2	Pre_Cohesion Post_Cohesion	-.767	1.194	.218	-1.213	-.321	-3.516	29	.001
Pair 3	Pre_Lexical- Post_Lexical	-.833	1.416	.259	-1.362	-.304	-3.223	29	.003
Pair 4	Pre_Grammar- Post_Grammar	-.833	1.020	.186	-1.214	-.452	-4.475	29	.000

**4.2. Qualitative Results**

The interview data offered further insights into how students experienced the use of e-portfolios in their academic writing course. Overall, students spoke positively about the process, describing it as an opportunity to see their own progress more clearly. Several noted that being able to revisit earlier drafts gave them a sense of achievement. One student reflected, *“When I looked at my first essay and compared it with my later ones, I could see fewer mistakes. It made me feel I was really moving forward”* (S2).

Students also emphasized how the e-portfolio shaped their approach to revising their writing. They reported that the system pushed them to recheck their essays more carefully before submission. For example, one student explained, *“Before, I just waited for the teacher’s correction. With the portfolio, I felt I needed to check my grammar and organize my ideas before uploading”* (S1). Another admitted that peer comments were sometimes too general, but the act of reviewing and reflecting still encouraged a more careful revision process: *“My friends’ comments were not always detailed, but reading them still made me think about what I should improve”* (S4). A recurring theme was the sense of responsibility and discipline that came with maintaining the e-portfolio. Students described the routine of uploading drafts and reflections as initially demanding, but later acknowledged its role in building consistency. As one student noted, *“At first it was tiring to upload every week, but later I got used to it, and it helped me to be more disciplined in my writing”* (S5). At the same time, students admitted that there were practical challenges. Some found the reflective writing component unclear, particularly in the early weeks: *“Sometimes I didn’t know how to write a reflection. I just wrote what I changed, but I wasn’t sure if that was enough”* (S3). Others suggested that more examples or models of reflections would have helped. Still, these difficulties were not seen as obstacles that diminished the value of the tool.

Finally, the interviews suggested that the e-portfolio had an impact on students’ motivation and confidence. Several described feeling more engaged in the writing process because they could see evidence of improvement. One student shared, *“Every week I*



could see my essays getting better. That gave me more motivation to write” (S3). Another added, “I felt more confident when I saw that my mistakes were fewer, especially in grammar. It made me believe I can improve if I practice” (S2).

Taken together, the interview findings portray the e-portfolio as more than a storage tool. For these students, it became a space to track growth, practice revision, and build habits of reflection. While challenges such as unclear expectations for reflections or uneven peer feedback were noted, the overall experience was described as beneficial, motivating, and supportive of students’ writing development.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the effectiveness of using e-portfolios as an Assessment for Learning (AfL) tool in improving the academic writing performance of first-year undergraduate students in Vietnam, as well as to explore students’ perceptions of the learning experience. The findings from both the quantitative and qualitative strands suggested that the intervention had a positive impact on students’ writing skills, particularly in task response and grammatical accuracy, and that students generally perceived the e-portfolio as a useful and motivating element of their learning process. The quantitative data demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in students’ overall writing performance between the pre-test and post-test. Mean overall band scores rose from 4.07 to 5.02, reflecting nearly a one-band increase over the semester. Significant gains were also noted in task response, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy, with more moderate improvements in coherence and cohesion. These results are consistent with earlier research that highlights the benefits of formative assessment methods for writing development (Haq et al., 2020; Nurhayati, 2020; Peltzer et al., 2024). The ability to document progress and revise iteratively appears to have helped students address weaknesses more effectively than in traditional product-oriented assessment. The interview data add depth to these findings by illustrating how students experienced the e-portfolio in practice. Participants described the portfolio as a space where they could see evidence of their growth over time. This visibility not only reinforced their sense of progress but also contributed to increased confidence in their writing. Such reflections resonate with prior studies that suggest e-portfolios enhance learner autonomy and self-efficacy (Aprianti & Winarto, 2021; López-Crespo et al., 2021). Moreover, the act of revisiting earlier drafts and comparing them with later versions was frequently mentioned as a source of motivation, which reflects the notion of Assessment for Learning as an ongoing practice of feedback, reflection, and response that supports continuous learning and improvement (Klenowski, 2009). Another important insight from the interviews was the shift in students’ approach to revision. Several reported that they no longer relied exclusively on teacher feedback but instead became more proactive in identifying errors and revising their own work. This echoes Panadero et al.’s (2017) argument that self-assessment, when integrated into formal learning activities, fosters self-regulated learning and strengthens students’ self-efficacy by guiding them to set clearer goals, track their progress, and reflect more effectively on their performance. While peer feedback was sometimes perceived as superficial or inconsistent, students nonetheless valued the process of giving and receiving comments, as it prompted them to rethink and refine their drafts. The study also highlighted challenges that need to be addressed for future implementation. Some students initially found reflective writing unclear and were uncertain about how to articulate their learning. This suggests that more explicit guidance and examples of effective reflections are necessary to maximize the benefits of the tool. Additionally, concerns about uneven peer feedback quality point to the need for structured rubrics or training to support students in providing constructive comments. These challenges are not unique; they have been noted in other e-portfolio studies (Khan & Hoq, 2022; Lam, 2022; Ngui et al., 2020), which emphasize the importance of scaffolding to ensure meaningful engagement. Overall, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings indicates that the e-portfolio intervention successfully combined assessment and learning in ways that improved writing outcomes and promoted student agency. The significant gains in task response and grammar, together with the reported increases in motivation and confidence, suggest that e-portfolios can be a valuable tool for supporting writing instruction in EFL contexts. The relatively smaller gains in coherence and cohesion, however, point to an area where additional pedagogical support may be required. The findings of this study hold several implications for EFL writing pedagogy. First, using e-portfolios as an AfL can promote reflective and self-regulated learning, moving students beyond reliance on teacher correction. Second, providing clear guidance and models for reflection, along with structured peer feedback rubrics, can enhance the quality of engagement. Finally, teachers and institutions should consider aligning e-portfolio use with formal assessment to strengthen commitment and accountability. In doing so, e-portfolios can become a powerful tool to support learner development and formative assessment in higher education contexts.



## 6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study investigated the use of e-portfolios as an assessment-for-learning tool in an academic writing module for first-year undergraduates. Quantitative results demonstrated significant improvements in overall writing scores, with notable gains in task response, lexical resources, and grammatical range and accuracy. Qualitative insights further highlighted that students valued the opportunity to track progress, reflect on revisions, and build greater confidence in their writing. These findings suggest that e-portfolios can effectively integrate assessment and learning by fostering revision, reflection, and autonomy. Nonetheless, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The absence of a control group limits the extent to which improvements can be attributed solely to the intervention, while the small sample size reduces generalizability. In addition, interview data came from only five participants, which may not fully capture the diversity of student experiences. Future research should employ larger samples, comparative designs, and longer-term follow-ups.

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