

Effects of Using e-Portfolios on EFL Teachers' Reflections

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Abstract--- *This study aims to investigate the effects of using e-Portfolios in enhancing Omani EFL teachers' reflections. This qualitative study sought to answer the question: How do e-portfolios enhance Omani EFL teachers' reflections? In order to answer this research question, the researchers used case studies of six Omani EFL teachers who developed their e-portfolios by writing their reflections in their own journals. The participants took four months to complete these journals. In order to explore how deep were the participants' reflections, each participant's journal was analysed and measured based on a certain rubric pertaining to writing reflective journals found in past studies. Finally, semi-structured interviews were used to elicit the participants' views regarding particular aspects of the project. The obtained data were classified into two major phases: within the first two months and within the last two months of developing e-portfolios. The findings revealed that the use of e-portfolios enabled the participants to develop their journals from being descriptive and narrative in nature into reflective ones. Other benefits of using e-portfolios that the participants had attained were also reported.*

Keywords--- *Case Studies, E-portfolio, Qualitative Data, Reflection, Reflective Journals, Teacher Development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Paper-based portfolios have been used in educational purposes and domains for many years. For example, they have been utilized in enhancing students' learning and directing self-assessment (Darling, 2001; Lam, 2018). Besides, many teachers use them to manage their life-long professional growth and evaluate their students' progress (Al-Qutaiti, 2011). More recently, technology has replaced the traditional way of developing and collecting one's work; therefore, electronic portfolios have emerged in education. E-portfolios outsmart the paper-based ones in many different ways. For instance, O'Rourke (2016) states that e-portfolios can foster a new approach to thinking about digital literacy and online curriculum. Also, he adds that e-portfolios open up paths to innovative, modern forms of pedagogy and knowledge that were previously hard to incorporate in traditional modes of teaching and assessment. In addition, Srika Bala, Wan Mansor, Stapa & Zakaria (2012) state that e-portfolios can include videos, sound clips, animations and recordings; thus they can enrich the teaching and learning processes more than traditional portfolios.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Writing journals is a good way for EFL teachers to pursue in-service education and learning (Cunliffe, 2004). For one reason, they allow time for reflection upon the teachers' own teaching in their classes. In addition, by writing and reading what has been annotated down, EFL teachers can revise what has been effective with their

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students. Also, this experience helps them to devise new methods of teaching, understand their students better and analyze what is needed to be accomplished with this particular teaching context (Bolton, 2010).

Although much research has revealed the effectiveness of the use of reflective journals (Allan & Driscoll, 2014; Murray, 2015), this unfolded value of paper-based written journals has reduced with the fact that the teachers cannot keep these written accounts for long due to the difficulty of storing and organizing them. In other words, they are not easily accessible or readily available when they are needed. In addition, they are not effortlessly shared with other teachers, mentors and educators (Lin, 2008). That is why a demand for such effective tools such as e-portfolios or learning management system have been raised. By using e-portfolios, EFL teachers can get back to their reflective journals at any time and they optionally share them with others (Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston, 2014; Rees, 2005; Slepcevic-Zach & Stock, 2018). They can refine their written journals and construct on what they have commenced. This research investigates the effectiveness of using e-portfolios to enhance EFL written journals.

One of the three researchers is a supervisor of English in the Ministry of Education in Oman. Although he always encouraged his teachers to have traditional portfolios and write journals that could be saved in these portfolios, he could not see the process of writing these journals or how they were developed. In fact, many EFL teachers were not motivated to do so since many of their written journals were not noticed or praised due to rarity of accessibility to these journals. This might be because by having face-to-face meetings merely, the supervisor could not enhance the progress of the written journals or even the production of these journals as not all teachers could meet him on his visiting days to a particular school. If the Ministry of Education creates e-portfolios for EFL teachers and their supervisors, this will probably facilitate the interactivity and accessibility to these written reflective journals at any time.

Research question

The problem of this study can be formulated in terms of the following research question:

1. How do e-portfolios enhance EFL teachers' reflections?

III. LITERATURE REVIEW AND RELATED STUDIES

E-portfolios and reflection

Garratte (2011) defined E-portfolios as a digitalized collection of artifacts that represent an individual's, group's or institution's demonstrations, learning, resources, and accomplishments. There has been a wide agreement in the literature that the greatest value in teaching e-portfolio development is reflection (Ma & Rada, 2005; Oakley, Pegrum & Johnston, 2014; Strudler & Wetzel, 2012). For example, Bullock and Hawk (2005) note that without written reflection, a portfolio is just a scrapbook. Therefore, an e-portfolio without reflection is just a multimedia presentation, or a fancy electronic resume, or a digital scrapbook (Samaras & Fox, 2013). Orland-Barak's (2005) study revealed that through a process of reflection student teachers are able to identify and take responsibility for their own learning.

Studying what (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2008; Hatton & Smith, 1995) wrote about reflection and its types), El-Okda (2009) defined reflection as a special type of thought that is linked with professional practice and in which the

practitioner attempts to de-routinize it and uncover the tacit beliefs and assumptions underlying it. Research on the e-portfolio as a tool for reflection has shown that ownership is an important condition for student teachers to use the process function as an effective assessment instrument for their learning purposes and professional development (Slepcevic-Zach & Stock, 2018; Van Aalst & Chan, 2007). Simatele (2015) also found that, through working on the e-portfolios, teachers gradually change their concept of what reflection in the e-portfolio entails, the purposes of reflection, and their own important roles throughout the process. The teachers increasingly realize that by using the e-portfolio to critically examine their teaching practices, they are becoming aware of their philosophy of teaching and learning and they could express their knowledge about learning and teaching in explicit terms. In addition, many scholars such as Montgomery (2002) and Imafuku et al (2018) revealed that e-portfolios in teacher education are influential tools for encouraging reflective thinking when followed by good developmental values, meaningful guidance and support. Finally, Cowan and Peacock (2017) found out that e-portfolios supported the development of higher-level abilities such as critiquing, problem solving and decision making among all participants. Also, they enhanced reflective options such as self-managed experiential learning and self-directed feedback.

Reflection enhancing tasks

The contents of e-portfolios can be some reflection enhancing tasks (El-Okda, 2009). They should be feasible and contextualized. All of these task types enhance reflection that leads to professional development. Some educators have suggested one or more of these reflective task types (action research, peer-observations, team teaching, peer coaching, self-assessment, critical incidents, written journals, and teaching autobiography) to be included in the teachers' e-portfolios (Cowan & Peacock, 2017; El-Dib, 2007; El-Okda, 2009). Also, Farrell (2018) suggested various types of activities that can enhance EFL teachers' reflection. He mentioned; for example, teaching metaphors, teachers' beliefs, action research and written journals. In addition, Farrell and Kennedy (2019) found out that reflective practice can immensely reshape teachers' knowledge of teaching and learning throughout their career. These teachers can write their ideas of teaching and/or discuss them with other educators. For the purpose of this study, the present researchers reviewed and used written journals with the participants as one of the reflection enhancing task types recommended to be used to investigate EFL teachers' reflective abilities.

Teachers' journals

A procedure which is becoming more widely acknowledged as an essential tool for developing EFL teachers' reflection is journal writing or diary. Four kinds of journals are commonly identified in teacher education. One of them is called dialogic journals which involves continuous interactions on learning and teaching between the pre-service teachers and the mentor teacher (Garmon, 2001). A second type of journal is response journals which engages teachers in thinking about teaching and learning with limited feedback or response from a supervisor or a teacher trainer (Good & Whang, 2002). Teaching journals are the third types of journal writing. They specifically deal with classroom teaching practices (Mi Kyong, 2018; Tsang & Wong, 1996). In addition, interactive group journals, which require discussions and interactions among teachers on their learning and teaching, are the fourth type of written journals (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012). All these types of journals are powerful tools to observe one's teaching and learning beyond the teaching routine and formal learning; and because of their candid nature,

they can provide their users with personal looks at the classroom world and might be the ones which have never been experienced before (Leigh & Bailey, 2013). On the advantages of keeping a personal diary, Gorman (1998) stated that journals can assist teachers enormously as long as teachers can be self-critical. However, writing journals without analyzing them is an incomplete practice. In other words, EFL teachers need to mull over what they write, react, examine, and evaluate their teaching to make decisions on necessary changes in order to improve their attitudes, beliefs and teaching practices. Goker (2016) supported this finding and he asserted that reflective journals could establish critical environments as EFL teachers provide themselves with chances to reflect on their current practices. By reading what they have written, EFL teachers can also relate the existing theories to teaching situations and practices.

Designing a framework for assessing reflection

Researchers have found that while teachers spend great amounts of time being engaged in assessment-related activities for their students, they do not implement this standard of assessment to their own practices (Chappuis, Chappuis & Stiggins, 2009). This may be due to the rarity of real attempts to prescribe good frameworks for assessing teachers' reflections in general and the EFL teachers' reflections in particular. There is a tremendous effort and massive literature on the meaning of reflection and why reflection is essential (Dewey, 1933; Farrell, 2015; Hatton & Smith, 1995). However, there is little to say on how to enhance or assess the teachers' reflections. To support this claim, Kember et al (2000); for example, asserted that many courses ask participants to reflect, but little mentioned how to assess these reflective acts. Therefore, it was difficult to find a rubric that assesses all types of reflection tasks. Reading the existing frameworks of assessing reflection, the researchers adopted El-Okda's rubric (2009) as it provides a comprehensive framework for assessing reflection in EFL student teachers' e-portfolios. He mentions three degrees of reflection (low, moderate and high) for written journals. Therefore, the assessors will find it clearly outlined to be followed and/or used. This framework is unlike the other frameworks such as (El-Dib, 2007; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Kember et al 2000; Ward & McCotter, 2004) on these following aspects:

- It is created for normal use not for the research purposes.
- The degrees of the rubric are integrated and they do not contradict each other.
- This framework can be used by both EFL pre-service teachers and EFL in-service teachers.
- It has three general levels of reflection that can be identified as:

A). Low level: Inadequate description of a certain practice, their alternatives, rationale, and their possible consequences. B). Moderate level: Adequate description of puzzles of practice, their alternatives, rationale and their possible consequences. C). High level: In addition to B, trying to infer tacit beliefs and assumptions embedded in practices and practical reasons and ability to weigh those tacit beliefs against principles of current stage teaching enhancing task type.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research design

We agreed to have a qualitative study to investigate effect of using e-portfolios on enhancing EFL teachers' reflections in Oman. It is qualitative research in nature since it allows the participants to write their own reflections

upon various issues pertaining to their teaching, learning, students..etc. Reflective journals are considered as one of effective data collection methods by which qualitative data can be gathered to elicit the respondents' assumptions (Farrah, 2019; Saldana, 2009). According to Farrell (2018), reflective journals allow EFL teachers to express and uncover their tacit beliefs and assumptions underlying the best teaching practices. Therefore, they are authentic, valid methods of data collection. In addition, Borg (2018) encourages qualitative researchers to depend on the participants' written journals to have rich data that can yield deeper reflections and robust research findings.

We chose to use qualitative methods as they can produce findings that cannot be arrived at by means of statistical procedures (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, Farrah, 2019; Watkins, 2012). Leedy and Ormrod (2001) stated five qualitative traditions: case study, grounded theory, phenomenology, ethnography, and content analysis. Creswell (2013) explained how potential the use of case studies can be for researchers. They can explore processes, activities and events. Therefore, case study is one of the best methods to study what participants write and say (Ahmad, 2017; Creswell, 2013; Watkins, 2012). Thus, we designated case studies to find out how reflective the participants were based on the adopted reflection rubric and the effects of using e-portfolios on EFL teachers' written journals.

Participants

The researchers decided to include only five active willing participants because this study demanded them to write many journals on the designed e-portfolios for four months. We also found a sixth, willing EFL teacher when one researcher informed all his thirty three teachers about the research and its instruments and aims. These six teachers consented to participate voluntarily and the researcher told them they would be written under pseudonyms: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E and Teacher F to guarantee confidentiality and meet the ethical considerations. We used the same pseudonyms in the data analysis. The participants were four female and two male teachers. All of them were teaching grades 11 and 12 in two Omani governmental schools. Their experiences ranged from 16 to 13 years and the participants were all bachelor holders. We depicted the participants' previous experiences on using e-learning tools such as e-portfolios, Moodle and online courses through analyzing their answers to four yes/no questions at the commencement of the study: Have you been involved in online courses during in service?, Did you have online courses when you were a student?, Have you used Moodle before?, Have you used e-portfolios before?. Teachers A and E responded with "No" to all questions. Teachers C and F replied with "No" to three questions and "Yes" to the question which asks about if they had used an online course when they were students. Whereas teacher D responded with "Yes" only to the question pertains to using online courses during in service. Teacher B answered two questions with "Yes". These questions asked about using online courses during in service and if she had used Moodle before. The results showed that most participants did not have adequate experience of using Moodle or e-portfolios before the program started. Despite this finding, all of them participated sufficiently and satisfactorily due to the introductory meeting and other factors that would be discussed later.

Data gathering and analysis

We decided to apply the qualitative research design because it helps efficiently to develop profound understanding and effective analysis in unique, natural settings rather means of statistical techniques (Ahmad, 2017; Watkins, 2012). This design can vividly analyze and describe the experiences and teaching ideas of the participants in genuine teaching accounts and conditions as they candidly write down their thoughts and concerns on their e-portfolios. Because we wanted the participants to have e-portfolios accounts, one of the researchers arranged with the IT department at Sultan Qaboos University to host the six participants and himself on Moodle. The IT department created e-portfolios on Moodle and gave user names and passwords to the researcher. The researcher held a meeting with the six participants and explained to them how to use Moodle, write their journals on a given link on e-portfolios and the duration of the study. Also, he provided them with their user names and passwords.

On the day of the meeting, the researcher gave the participants a self-report that consists of six questions to see their initial reflection before the commencement of the research (Explained later). In this present study, to understand the participants reflection and experiences, we collected the six EFL teachers data through asking them to write journals throughout the study period and answer interview questions posted on their e-portfolios at the end of the study. To be consistent, we asked the participants to write their reflections on any challenge or situation(s) related to these sub-themes: students, curriculum, assessment, classroom management, preparation and planning, professional development. Besides, the participants were free to reflect upon any concern regarding their own beliefs on teaching.

We gave teachers four months to complete all their journals on their portfolios as we know reflective practice needed time and effort and teachers in general are busy people. One of the researchers could see what was written throughout the study period as he was accessible to all participants' journals and the six participants knew and agreed that the researcher had the ability to view their journals day by day. Therefore, the researcher motivated the six participants by saying "well-done", "excellent"; and he felt it was necessary to encourage the participants to continue writing till the end of the fourth month. All journals were copied from the e-portfolios and classified according to the participants: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E and Teacher F. Once the data set was ready, the coding process commenced. Since we agreed to use a rubric in literature (El-Okda, 2009) to see how deep the reflection of the six participants throughout the period of the study was, one of the researchers told his co-authors that the data could be divided into two timings: the first two months and the second two months based on the rubric. As this researcher was available from the beginning till the end of the study, he could view the progress of the teachers' journals. He explored that the participants evolved in their reflections based on the adopted reflection rubric (will be further discussed in the findings). Adjei (2019) states that when a researcher's interpretation of data is stemmed from and based on participants' concerns, it grounds discursive work in sound theoretical and analytical position. The process can offer researchers opportunities to identify topics, issues under relevant themes and revealed through the participants' narratives (Farrah, 2019). In addition, the coding process assists researchers in embarking on interpreting the world from each participant's views (Sutton & Austin, 2015). We analyzed the data based on thematic analysis. As thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative analytic method and it is recognized for its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Farrah, 2019; Watkins, 2012). In this study, we were

looking for the level of reflection upon the challenges that pertained to students, professional development, preparations, assessment and classroom management. We analyzed the level of reflections in these written journals based on a reflection rubric (explained later).

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are essential in all research area, but it is more important in qualitative research in particular (Arifin, 2018). It is the responsibility of the researchers to keep the participants identities and personal information unrevealed (Ahmad, 2017; Arifin, 2018). They should make sure that the participants are willing to participate without any kind of pressure on them. Besides, the researchers should make it clear to the participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell, 2013). Bearing these in mind, one of the researchers (the supervisor) asked all his thirty three teachers assigned to him in the academic year 2017 and 2018 if any would have liked to participate in the study voluntarily. He emphasized that it was optional to take part and their data would be confidential. At the beginning, he got ten teachers who were willing to participate, but then four of them were hesitant and withdrew. Then, we put the target number of participants as five, but we found one teacher who was very eager to take part in the study, so the number became six. All participants were not coerced because supervisors do not evaluate teachers if they have a senior teacher in a school in Oman. All the six EFL teachers had senior teachers, so the authority of the researcher did not intervene here and this revealed that the participants consented to be in the study because they wanted to do so and not because they had to. Also, on the first day of the study, the researcher informed the participants that they would be put under pseudonyms: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E and Teacher F; and the data would be used for research purposes only.

The research instruments

The self-report

The two researchers used self-report to see how reflective those six EFL teachers were before the project commenced. The self-report was one of the most fundamental instruments used to identify the level of reflection that participants had before using e-portfolios. Hence, it helped to find if the teachers' reflection enhanced through using e-portfolios (Al-Qutaiti, 2011; El-Okda, 2009). We developed this self-report after having read what had been written about reflective practice in second language education (El-Okda, 2009; Farrell, 2008; Farrell, 2015, Farrell, 2018a; Hatton and Smith, 1995). Before conducting the present study, one researcher tried the questions with two voluntary teachers who could understand them without help; and he asked them if they faced any vague point. Both teachers said that the questions were clear and language used could be easily understood. This piloting process gave the researchers the confidence, trustworthiness, dependency and conformability they needed to rely on this research instrument. After that, the Omani researcher conducted the self-report on the introductory meeting day with the participants. Six reflective practices were listed and the participants were asked to indicate how frequent they practised such reflective actions. The following five point Likert scale was adopted: 5.= always, 4.= often, 3.= sometimes, 2.= rarely, 1.= never. In addition, the teachers were requested to write their own reasons for having or not having those reflective practices.

Teachers' written contributions on their e-Portfolios

The six EFL teachers developed their e-portfolios by writing their journals. These written accounts are considered to be an invaluable study instrument because they are documents that qualitative studies can rely on easily) Ahmad, 2017, Creswell, 2013). We asked the participants to write about the class events and reflect upon them regularly in four month project. The participants wrote the journals throughout the study period and kept what they wrote on e-portfolios. They continued writing, editing and rewriting. The written journals could be about anything related to teaching environment such as one's teaching techniques, methods, ideas, assessment, critical incidents and students. We informed the six participants to describe anything they thought it was essential and reflect on it.

The rubric of assessing teaching journals

The researchers adopted the rubric for assessing teaching diaries written by EL-Okda (2009) in order to assess and analyze the participants' written journals in terms of how reflective they were. This rubric is divided into three levels of reflection on teachers' journals. The firstone is called "low" level in which teachers can briefly describe a teaching practice, events, situation and think of very few alternatives, possible reasons or consequences. The second level of reflection El-Okda called "moderate" where teachers can adequately describe a teaching practice, event, situation, critical incident and consider multi-reasons and consequences without considering the implicit assumptions, beliefs or moral issues. The third level of reflection is entitled as a "high" reflection in which EFL teachers can consider the tacit beliefs, assumptions underlying a fully described teaching practice, event, situation, its consequences and moral implications.

To make the description easier and more obvious for the readers,

Table 1: Illustrates the three levels of reflection

Task type	Level of reflection		
Journals	Low	Moderate	High
	EFL teachers can briefly describe a teaching consequences practice/ event/ situation and think of very few alternatives, possible reasons or consequences.	Can adequately describe a teaching practice/ event/ situation/ critical incident and consider multi-reasons and consequences without considering the implicit assumptions/ beliefs or moral issues.	Can consider the tacit beliefs/ assumptions underlying a fully described teaching practice/ event/ situation, its consequences and moral implications

Semi-structured interview questions (validity)

The semi-structured interviews were viewed as a very valuable instrument in qualitative studies (Ahmad, 2017). The self-report was conducted before using the e-portfolios while the interviews were done after using e-portfolios

in order to see the effect of using e-portfolios on the participants' reflection. Three questions were posted, so the six participants could write their responses at the end of the project to investigate the effect of e-portfolios usage on EFL teachers' reflective abilities. The questions about the benefits of e-portfolios, the challenges and the lessons learnt from a certain project are found before in the literature so their validity has been checked (EL-Okda, 2009; Leigh & Bailey, 2013; Meeus, Petegem & Engels, 2009; Montgomery, 2002; Srika Bala, 2016).

V. RESULTS

In this study, we analyzed the data obtained from teachers' written journals in their e-portfolios, and online interviews were analyzed qualitatively using single and multi-case studies. Yin (2014) presented two strategies for general use: one is to rely on theoretical propositions of the study, and then to analyze the evidence based on those propositions. The other technique is to develop a case description, which would be a framework for organizing the case study. There searchers followed the second strategy that Yin (2014) recommended. In brief, a framework of assessing reflection enhancing task is introduced and described and then the participants' e-portfolios are assessed accordingly. Moreover, we analyzed the data attained from the survey quantitatively and its main purpose is to complement the qualitative dominating evidence.

We followed these procedures chronologically and specifically. First, we analyzed the six participants' responses pertaining to the self-report six questions before the beginning the project to see if the participants were reflective enough. Then, we reviewed all journals written on the e-portfolios and we noticed that the journals written in the last two months were deeper, so we classified the journals into two phases: the first two months of the project and the last two months. The distinction was made because of different levels of reflection and contributions. Finally, we analyzed the written responses to the semi-structured interview questions posted on e-portfolios. Each participant responded individually and confidentially because each one had his own e-portfolio.

Findings from the survey responses

We scrutinized the responses supplied in self-report thoroughly to give the whole picture of the six participants' previous practice and experiences of the reflection enhancing task (written journals). We used a descriptive qualitative approach first and then a quantitative presentation in a form of a table. Each participant was given a self-report on which one question was "*How often did you write teaching journals?*". Teacher A and Teacher C indicated that they never wrote teaching journals. Three of the participants revealed that they rarely wrote teaching journals. Only Teacher F admitted that he sometimes wrote teaching journals. Another question was "*How often did you think of alternative ways of teaching something you have taught?*" Four teachers said that they rarely thought of alternative ways of teaching something they had taught because they often followed the steps or the procedures provided in the text books. The other two indicated that they sometimes thought of alternative ways of teaching something they had taught when they felt that their previous classes were passive. The third inquiry was about "*Thinking of the reasons of language teaching practices you often use in class.*" Teacher E participant replied he never did so. Four others answered that they rarely thought of these reasons. Teacher D revealed that she sometimes thought of the reasons behind her teaching practices.

A fourth question in the self-report was “How often did you consider the underlying beliefs, assumptions, values implied in those reasons?” Five participants revealed that they never considered these underlying beliefs implied in their reasons for certain practice. One of the participants stated that she rarely did so. The fifth question was how often the six EFL teachers “*consider the possible consequences of what you do in class.*” Four of the participants stated that they rarely considered the consequences of what they did in their classes. While two participants revealed that they sometimes considered the consequences of what they had done in the classes. The last question was “How often did you teach English in more or less the same way your teachers had taught you?” Three of them revealed they always taught similar to what their favourite school teachers had taught them before and the other three stated that they often did as their English teachers had taught them.

We delineated these findings in a form of a table, so the readers can find out easily how often the six participants performed a certain teaching practice before writing their journals on e-portfolios.

Table 2: How often a certain teaching practice performed by the participants before the project

Item	How often.....?	never	rarely	sometimes	often	always	Reasons
1	Writing teaching journals	2	3	1			
2	Thinking of alternative ways of teaching something you have taught		4	2			
3	Thinking of the reasons of language teaching practices you often use in class	1	4	1			
4	Considering the underlying beliefs/ assumptions/ values implied in those reasons	5	1				
5	Considering the possible consequences of what you do in class		4	2			
6	Teaching English in more or less the same way your teachers had taught you				3	3	

From the result above, it could be concluded that writing journals was insufficiently practised by the selected EFL teachers. Writing’ journals enhances teachers’ reflection (Kavoshian, Ketabi & Tavakoli, 2016); and eventually fosters teachers’ on-going professional development (Farrell, 2018b). In addition, they did not consider their beliefs or possible consequences frequently. Moreover, they hardly thought of alternative ways of teaching something they had taught before. All these findings meant that the six participants did not practise reflection on teaching journals adequately or appropriately.

Those six EFL teachers justified their de-motivation of writing journals in three major points. First, there was a little support from others due to the lack of an effective communicative means such as e-portfolios or blogs. Second, they could not see the benefits of reflective journals. Thirdly, those who wrote their teaching journals in papers claimed that they lost many of them when they wanted to refer to them or show their supervisors. Gradually, they started to lose the interest of writing their thoughts down.

Findings concerning writing journals within the first two months of using e-portfolios

We qualitatively used an interpretive approach and the adopted rubric of assessing reflection to present and explicate the findings that pertained to the six EFL teachers’ written journals found on the e-portfolios in the first two months of the project. According to the rubric, all six participants could only produce descriptive journals. They

described what happened in their own classes. For instance, one of the teaching journals of teacher C is taken as an illustration. She wrote that,

When I taught Act.8 "writing" about Jack Thayer; a survivor from Titanic, I started with asking Qs about his photo as: Is the photo old or new? How old is he in this photo ?...etc, Then I got them to read the personal information written about him. After that, I attracted their attention to the pictures which showed how he sur-vived. Finally, students were asked to imagine themselves Jack and start writing hisstory using the information table.

Then she added that "*students were very imaginative and creative in telling the story that I wished the lesson would not finish!*"

The teacher described what she did with the learners that made her feel happy at the end of the lesson. In the above-mentioned instances the teacher described her feelings when she noticed that her students could perform the activities correctly and lively. She also commented on how well their performance was. In other words, she merely described what occurred in the class that made her feel the success of her teaching. Moreover, she described her teaching procedures, activities and/or steps that she followed with a particular class. These teaching diaries were not that reflective. They were descriptive or narrative in nature.

Furthermore, some of those six EFL teachers described problem(s) occurred in their classes. As an illustration, Teacher F wrote,

Group work is one of words that has been familiarized to all of us in our basic education system. I faced a problem when I tried it for the first time; most of the students were talking or gossiping while I was teaching. I felt that this method is ridiculous and I planned to give up with it, but I said I will have another try with the second class. The result was unfortunately worse and even with the third and fourth classes.

Here this teacher mentioned a problem that he faced and he reported it. However, he did not state how to solve it or what his tacit beliefs about group work were. Also, he did not justify his thoughts and beliefs about the group work.

From the selected case studies on written journals in this stage of using e-portfolios, the six EFL teachers simply reported the factual events of any given day. They basically recorded a list of actions which took place in their classes. Those actions mainly pertained to their success or failure of making their students achieve the intended outcomes, their students' behaviors, classroom management and/or teaching methods. Many of these teachers described problems emerged in their teaching environment without giving solutions to them. Referring to the rubric of assessing teaching journals, this is a low level of reflection that teacher displayed at this particular stage of the project. That was because the six participants could briefly describe a teaching practice, event, situation and think of a few alternatives, possible reasons or consequences.

Findings regarding writing journals within the last two months of using e-portfolios

In this stage, the six EFL teachers could elaborate on their journals, so that those diaries were developed from being descriptive in nature into reflective ones. They learned to do this by keeping writing their journals on their e-portfolios for four months. The evolution of journals might occur due to the accessibility feature that allowed them to share comments. In addition, the participants might show progress in writing their journals because of the researcher's motivational words such as "Excellent and Well-done" or the prompts "How?" and "Why?" posted consistently. A salient example could be found in Teacher's C journals of this stage as she mentioned alternative ways for certain teaching practice and possible reasons. As a result the following journal of Teacher C was reflected upon more by mentioning the justifications for the teacher's techniques,

When I taught Act.8 "writing" about Jack Thayer; a survivor from Titanic, I started with asking.....etc. When teachers let students imagine themselves in a particular situation or a particular person, students start to think seriously and do the task from their hearts. Attracting students' attention to the pictures ensures their participation, especially the weak sts. I can do the following next time I ask students to make an interview with Jack which increase the number of participants in an interesting way. It would be better if I distribute comprehension questions instead of letting sts read the information and then start writing.

A second good example of how teaching diaries of the participants evolved to be reflective can be taken from Teacher F. He built upon the same description written at the earlier stage, but here he tried to solve the problem when he elaborated,

I asked one of the senior teachers who has known how to deal with such a problem. He advised me to reinforce students by marks or nice words. For a moment, I thought this was a puzzle, but I decided to challenge and solve it. Suddenly, a plenty of ideas came to my mind, thank to all class visits and teaching practices. I planned to: 1. Choose a leader for each group who is clever and can motivate the others and this leadership must not be fixed to few students in the class because other students must be trained with this kind of abilities. 2. Draw a chart on the white board with the names or numbers of the groups and put 5 marks next to each group. The active group can get +1 and the talkative group can get -1 during the lesson. At the end of the lesson, I announce the winner and if there is a tie, we break that tie with quick a question related to the lesson. 3. The reinforcement sometimes are marks, pencils or any other presents. Thus, I found most of the weak students even the mischievous and the talkative students were calm and active to participate with the active ones.

Then, he added,

Actually, due to this journal, I raise the flag and call for several beliefs such as 1. Teachers should not give up hope, but they should search for solutions to their problems in teaching by asking experienced educators or having peer visits. 2. A second thought by an expert teacher is needed in most of the teaching cases. 3. Teachers should be optimistic and think of the ways to activate their students. 4. The active ss can help the teacher to activate other students and submit his holy message which is "teaching". Also, he wrote that groups should be mixed abilities.

At the earlier stage, the same teacher could express the problem only. He mentioned what happened in his class without thinking of his reactions or solutions to the current obstacle. However, at this stage he tackled the problem(s) by asking an experienced teacher, thinking deeply on what occurred and observing other teachers and learning from them. He could plan well in order to have a successful group work next time. It seemed that he started to believe in reinforcement when having group work. In addition, he believed in the necessity of having mixed abilities in each group in order to maintain a fruitful group work. Most importantly, this journal helped this teacher to ask other colleagues and think positively. Teacher F started to reflect profoundly and learn from what he wrote in his written journals. That provided evidence of teachers' evolution in their reflection at this stage of using e-portfolios with the six participants.

From the selected examples, it can be concluded that in this stage of using e-portfolios, all six Omani EFL teachers could transcend the straightforward descriptions of events that they wrote in the first two months of the project. Many of them used those descriptions as a basis for later reflection. At this stage (within the last two months of the project), the participants could reach a better level of reflection. In other words, they could have a greater understanding of the complex dynamics that occurred within their classrooms since they did not solely describe what emerged in their teaching surroundings. At this stage, some teachers could write very reflective teaching diaries as they mentioned their justifications for certain teaching behaviors. In addition, they highlighted some implied beliefs in specific actions and provided appropriate solutions for particular problems. They seemed to show greater self-awareness and more reflection. Because of using case studies, the researcher provided only two examples of this stage as evidence of the teachers' development in their reflections. It can be concluded that the six Omani EFL teachers could adequately describe a teaching practice, event, situation, critical incident and consider multi-reasons and consequences without considering the implicit assumptions, beliefs or moral issues. This is a moderate level of reflection that all six participants could reach within the last two months of the experience.

At this stage, two participants could reach the third level of reflection. As an illustration one of the (Teacher's B journal) was a high level of reflection. She wrote that

When I was training to be a teacher and when I was a student myself, I always had been taught listening the same way 1. The students read the instructions. 2. The teacher plays the cassette recorder for three times 3. Students listen and mark the correct answer. 4. The teacher elicits the correct answer and write them on the board. It is always the same with a cassette or with a CD. The students may not enjoy this for certain reason.

She reflected on the given procedures of teaching listening and she recalled her teacher doing the same when she was a learner of English. She thought of possible reasons for students' reluctance to listening lessons. And she came up with three reasons to justify their de-motivation towards listening. She said, *"listening doesn't relate to them, there is no personal connection, many times it is boring and it's difficult when it's spoken by native accents."*

Because of this deep thinking, teacher B started to reflect upon what to do with her learners when she is going to teach them listening.

So in my grade 11 and 12 classes, I started to do something else. I remember teaching the students the listening and they didn't understand it. Therefore, I decided that listening should be connected to something fun and something they can do outside class and not only in class. so the closest thing I could think of is songs. Thus, I chose songs that relate to students lives, like happiness, friendship or global issues like environment protection.

She began to do the following:

1. I chose the song, and I gave them the lyrics with some missing words.
2. The students read through and guess first the topic.
3. I discussed with the students that topic which would give the students chances to express them-selves and listen to each other.
4. I asked the students to guess the missing words.
5. The students read and listen for the song and tried to complete.
6. I gave them the full lyrics and asked the students to read it in groups.
7. I encouraged the students to sing along with the song. It is not graded, but for fun.

What made this reflection high was that the teacher gave a full description of the situation, mentioned her beliefs, suggested alternative ways, provided possible reasons for her reactions and wrote what she learned from her reflection. This teaching diary was very thorough and comprehensive. Furthermore, the teacher listed what she learned from writing such a reflective diary in these points.

1. Listening is one of the difficult skills for the students to do.
2. Students should be encouraged to love the language and love its culture.
3. Teacher should use different methods even if it was disliked by others.
4. Learning is fun and it isn't exclusive to class-rooms, it should be done everywhere.

This third level of reflection on writing teacher journals, in which teachers can consider the tacit beliefs, assumptions underlying, provide a fully described teaching practice, event, situation, its consequences and moral implications, is described as the highest. In this study, only two participants could achieve "high level of reflection" in three of their written journals.

Findings from the interview responses

The researchers analyzed all six teachers' participants' answers to all three questions posted on the e-portfolios and they opted for purposive sampling to present what the whole group thought. We classified the answers into three sub-themes: benefits of e-portfolios, the challenges that the participants encountered during implementation stage and the lesson learnt from the project. Commencing with the replies to the first question about benefits, the

researchers used case studies as examples. Teacher B said *“the easiness of finding what has been written is one of the best advantages of e-portfolios.”* Teacher D wrote *“being able to discuss your ideas with other teachers was a great help to enhance my reflections.”* And Teacher E stated that *“e-portfolios are a learning tool as you can share your journals with others who can guide you.”* To sum up, the participants found e-portfolios as helping tools to discuss their ideas and experiences with others, so their reflections are enhanced considerably. Also, e-portfolios can keep teachers’ written reflections and make the retrieval of these reflections easy and accessible when needed.

The replies to the second question about the challenges of using e-portfolios, all the participants admitted that the availability of the internet was a bit challengeable sometimes. Also, at the beginning of the project, six of the participants agreed that the novelty of using e-portfolios was a challenge. But then all of them admitted that these two challenges were managed successfully in a short time. Teacher A; for example, said *“I encountered a problem of using e-portfolio and then I asked the researcher for more explanation on how to use it, then it was simple to write there.”* Teacher F said *“I subscribed to faster internet connection bundles and I could do the tasks meaningfully on my mobile.”* To conclude, all six participants found that using e-portfolios at the beginning was challengeable and the availability of the internet was a challenge sometimes. However, all of the participants could solve these problems because the internet was getting faster and mobile learning assisted teachers who were involved in the project. Besides, the researcher’s explanation of how to use e-portfolios correctly aided the participants to solve encountered issues.

Finally, the answers to the question pertain to the lessons learnt from the project could be summarized as positive results to all six participants. Teacher A said that *“I learnt that using e-portfolio is a good idea to keep lifelong learning.”* Teacher B wrote that *“e-portfolios assisted me in regulating my thoughts, efforts and skills.”* Besides, Teacher C said *“using e-portfolios helped me to be more autonomous and reflective.”* In addition, Teacher D stated that *“I learned that e-portfolios could foster ELF teachers’ reflective abilities and negotiable skills.”* Also, Teacher E wrote that *“using e-portfolios could get teachers to use more online learning tools on their teaching and learning.”* Eventually, Teacher F said that *“e-portfolios could be one of the best ways of developing one’s journals and professional development activities such as writing good English and fruitful discussions.”* To summarize these positive effects of using e-portfolios on EFL teachers, we found that e-portfolios assisted the participants to keep lifelong learning, regulate their thoughts, efforts and skills. Besides, e-portfolios helped the participants to be more autonomous, develop their reflective and negotiable skills. In addition, e-portfolios supported the participants’ knowledge of using online activities and tools. Moreover, e-portfolios were able to improve the participants’ journals in terms of reflection, English level and discussions.

VI. DISCUSSION

Many findings of this study are consistent with previous research results. For instance, we found that the six participants thought that reflection meant only description of what they did in their classes without mentioning the reasons, beliefs or how to apply reflective practice correctly, and this finding was reported by many researchers (Cowan & Peacock, 2017; El-Okda, 2009; Farrell, 2018b; Hatton and Smith, 1995). In fact, there is no consensus over a general definition for reflection (Farrell, 2008a; Slepcevic-Zach & Stock, 2018). As a result, Farrell and Yang

(2019) view reflection as self-awareness rather than correcting mistakes. In this study, the readers will find a clear framework for reflection when they read the adopted rubric and follow how it is implemented by reading the excerpts of the participants. For example, they can observe the development of participants B and F as soon as they read their reflections which ameliorated from low to moderate. In addition, the readers will see how the participant C could reach high level of reflection when she reflected on her teaching of listening. Therefore, this study may enable teachers to attain high level of reflections upon teaching other skills (reading, writing and speaking and sub-skills (vocabulary, grammar, spelling and pronunciation) as well.

Furthermore, some of these additional findings that pertain to necessity of motivation when reflection is practised effectively. Without regular motivation and reinforcement, teachers could become bored of writing unseen ideas (Cohen-Sayag & Fischl, 2012; Farrell, 2015) Scaffolding reflection is recommended by some researchers such as (Hegarty, 2011) who suggested using reflection framework for teachers, and (Hall, 2017) who recommended using blogs to enhance teachers' reflections. In this study, we revealed that using e-portfolios was a kind of motivation for teachers to keep writing journals and add to their knowledge. This finding was consistent with what (Entwistle & Karagiannopoulou, 2014; Tosh, Penny Light, Fleming & Haywood, 2005) have found. They also uncovered that e-portfolios promote engagement and motivation because the participants were free to choose the artifacts and the timing of their reflection. Moreover, we found that e-portfolios have many benefits for EFL teachers such as helping them become more autonomous, professional and self-directed. Similar findings were reported by Riebenbauer & Stock (2013) as they pointed out that e-portfolios were significant in the area of self-reflective learning and teaching as they encouraged teachers to think deeper in their practices and decisions. In addition, we found out that e-portfolios helped EFL teachers to improve their reflective journals and other professional skills. Also, our findings were consistent with Bass and Eynon (2009) who reported that e-portfolios not only helped the participants to see the products, but they also showed them the process of critical reflections through regular feedback. According to Basken (2008), e-portfolios are a method to generate learning as well as document learning. Likewise we found that participants viewed e-portfolios as record keepings.

This research is unique as it is one of the rare studies pertaining to using e-portfolios and reflection done with in-service teachers. The majority of research on this area focused on students and pre-service teachers (Hall, 2017; Hartman & Calandra, 2007; Riebenbauer & Stock, 2013; Ritzhaupt, Singh, Seyferth & Dedrick, 2008). Therefore, this study is a good addition to the literature written about e-portfolios and reflective journals for in-service teachers learning and professional growth (Cowan and Peacock, 2017).

Having written their journals, the six participants could develop themselves professionally via using e-portfolios. Their e-portfolios were developed by having more evidence of the development of their reflections. Although before the project some participants did not practise any of writing journals, they could reach to moderate or high level of reflection at the end of using e-portfolios with them. The novelty of this study is that the readers not only find the descriptive reflection rubric, but also they can learn how to implement it to reach a high level of reflection on their practices. Besides, they can discover the effect of using e-portfolios on the enhancement of the participants' reflective abilities. We can summarize the results of the present study in the following points:

- Using e-portfolios enabled the six participants to describe teaching practices/ events/situations/ critical incidents and consider multi-reasons and consequences without considering the implicit assumptions/ beliefs or moral issues adequately.
- It helped two of them consider the tacit beliefs/ assumptions underlying a fully described teaching practices/ events/ situations, its consequences and moral implications.
- It encouraged all the participants to keep their teaching journals because they could find them when they need to refer to them.
- E-portfolios assisted the six EFL teachers in becoming more autonomous, self-directed, knowledgeable and skillful in both English and online activities when writing their written journals.

VII. CONCLUSION

We believe this study provides insights into the effect of using e-portfolios on enhancing the EFL teachers' journals from being descriptive to more reflective. Also, the results of the study indicate that EFL teachers were motivated when they noticed that their supervisor and colleagues could praise them and help them write better journals. Based on the findings, the Ministry of Education should apply using e-portfolios for its teachers and supervisors in order to access to each other's' thoughts and practices easier. A pursuit of more in-depth quantitative and qualitative research may yield more evidence on the effectiveness of using e-portfolios for Omani teachers, trainers and supervisors from various subjects perspectives not confined to English teachers. Regardless of the positive results of this study, it does not allow for generalizability as it depends on case study and multi-case studies approach with only six teachers.

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