BENIN EFL STUDENTS'ATTITUDES TOWARD ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT METHODS IN DIDACTICS : PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION AT UNIVERSITIES

ATTITUDES DES ÉTUDIANTS DU BÉNIN EFL À L'ÉGARD DES MÉTHODES D'ÉVALUATION ALTERNATIVES EN DIDACTIQUE : MISE EN ŒUVRE DE PORTFOLIOS DANS LES UNIVERSITÉS

Arlette J. Viviane HOUNHANOU
University of Abomey-Calavi (UAC), Benin
akannisalami6@gmail.com

Abstract: Today many researchers raise the issue of Alternative assessment approach in learning process. One of this alternative assessment is in the implementation of portfolio in educational context at Universities. The current paper analyses students'attitudes in using a portfolio as a means of assessment methods in Didactics. Two public universities were selected to conduct this study. Questionnaire, interview and classroom observation in amphitheaters were the instruments used for this research study. An overall of 605 students and twelve EFL lecturers in Didactics participated in this research study. Students'opinion reveals that constant research and daily reflection in observing teachers in the classroom context, and compiling summary of reading are more beneficial for acquiring quickly concepts than sitting for a final test. The results of the study also show that students have a positive view about the use of portfolio as a means of assessment at the university level.
Keywords: EFL, alternative assessment, didactics, portfolio.

Résumé : Aujourd'hui, de nombreux chercheurs soulèvent la question de l'approche d'évaluation alternative dans le processus d'apprentissage. L'une de ces évaluations alternatives concerne la mise en œuvre du portfolio dans le contexte éducatif dans les universités. Le présent article analyse les attitudes des étudiants à l'égard de l'utilisation d'un portfolio comme moyen d'évaluation des méthodes en didactique. Deux universités publiques ont été sélectionnées pour mener cette étude. Le questionnaire, l'entrevue et l'observation en classe dans les amphithéâtres ont été les instruments utilisés pour cette étude de recherche. Au total, 605 étudiants et douze conférenciers EFL en didactique ont participé à cette étude de recherche. L'opinion des élèves révèle que la recherche constante et la réflexion quotidienne dans l'observation des enseignants dans le contexte de la classe et la compilation de résumés de lecture sont plus bénéfiques pour acquérir rapidement des concepts que de s'asseoir pour un test final. Les résultats de l'étude montrent également que les étudiants ont une opinion positive de l'utilisation du portfolio comme moyen d'évaluation au niveau universitaire.
Mots-clés : EFL; évaluation alternative; didactique; portefeuille.

Introduction

Assessing students at the university level remains an issue today all over the world. Educators have tried several approaches to solve the problem. Benin has undergone a series of reforms regarding assessment. With the program by objective, students were not able to take initiative by themseves. Students were not autonomous. With the Competency-Based Approach (CBA), students are more creative and independent. The Graduate-Master-Doctorate (LMD) system reinforces more the concept of independency at the university. The student and the lecturer are more partners. The lecturer is a facilitator and assist students. Due to the increasing number of studentsle lecturers think about using different types of assessment materials instead of submitting students to simple and regular tests. Portfolio is one of the materials developed by lecturers to allow students feel more productive.

In fact, Portfolio is a collection of a student's work prepared over a period oftime. According to Simon and Forgette-Giroux (2000: 36), "portfolio is a cumulative and ongoing collection of entries that are selected and commented on by the student, the teacher and/or peers, to assess the student's progress in the development of a competency".Portfolio assessment is an assessment form that students organize collaboratively with their lecturers. The work itself contains student's work and it shows progress over time. Simon and Forgette-Giroux (2000: 36) define as "portfolio is a cumulative and ongoing collection of entries that are selected and commented on by the student, the teacher and/or peers, to assess the student's progress in the development of a competency".

In Benin, the way assessment is organized at the University level is problematic. The assessment is organized in the traditional and conventional way. Students attend courses, sit for their final. Components of the Assessment are around multiple-choice questions (MCQ) and WH -questions. After the feedback, a great number of students fail even those who attend classes regurlarly. There is a constant complain from students and parents. In these conditions there may be other forms of Assessment that may engage students think critically and lead them to reflect on their own teaching Practices. The current study aims at introducing portfolio as an alternative assessment method in EFL didactics specifically at universities. To achieve this objective, information of portfolio such as its definition, its process, and the issues of its implementation, the different forms of portfolio, the benefits for students, and its drawbacks were analyzed thoroughly.

1. **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to implement the use of portfolio as a means of assessment at the university level. To achieve this goal, some important information of portfolio such as its definition, its importance regarding students in EFL Didactics, its developing process, the contents and its evaluation, the different types of portfolio to be used, its advantages and drawbacks were discussed in depth.

2. **Research Questions**

For this current research, the following research questions were established:

What was students'beliefs in using portfolio as a means of assessment?

What were the challenges in assessing students at the university with the implementation of Portfolio?

3. Literature Review

The literature review of this study is based on the definition of portfolios, its importance, their advantages; and drawbacks, the content and types of portfolio, and the assessment of portfolio at the university level.

3.1. *Definition of the term Portofolio and its importance*

The term portfolio derives from the Latin verb portare, which means to carry and the Latin noun foglio, which means sheets or leaves of paper. Indeed, the concept of portfolios comes from the artist's portfolio. The concept of portfolio was spread in elementary schools, later in secondary schools and today generalized in higher education.

A portfolio is a collection of academic work and other types of educational projects compiled for the purpose of assessing the quality of a course, learning progress, and academic performance. It may determine if students have met learning goals. Portfolio shows students' growth over time, and what is important is in the quality of the work assembled, not the amount of the papers collected for quantity. It is important to note that portfolio cannot be viewed only as a collection of materials developed by students. Rather portfolio should be considered as tools that provide comprehensible information about students and feedback on their performance. (Rao, 2006). Portfolio are used as medium for reflection. (Jones and Shelton,2011:21). It simply implies that portfolio assist students to reflect about their own learning process and assess their skills progress.

Student's portfolio seems to be more appropriate methods to learning, teaching and evaluation at university level than 'traditional' evaluation (oral exam, written exam, webinar, conferences etc.). (Hinett & Thomas, 1999; Sentocnik, 1999; Rolheiser, 2000). Portfolio can be viewed as a useful tool both for instruction and assessment. Properly designed and implemented, it provides authentic language material for assessment. Portfolios can be viewed as a useful tool both for instruction and assessment. Properly designed and implemented, it provides authentic language material for assessment. For Simon and Forgette-Giroux (2000: 36), "portfolio is a cumulative and ongoing collection of entries that are selected and commented on by the student, the lecturer and/or peers, to assess the student's progress in the development of a competency". According to Arter and Spandel (1991), portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that displays to the student, lecturers, and parents his or her efforts or achievement in one or more domains. Paulson, Paulson and Mayer (1991: 60) define that portfolio is a purposeful collection of student's works that exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievement in one or more areas. For Vizyak, (1996), portfolio includes student work that provides clear evidence to the student, parent, and other educators of the student's knowledge, skills, strategies, grasp of concepts, attitudes, and achievement in a given area or areas over a specific time period. While compiling

and organizing their ideas, students analyze carefully their learning experience on the ground, and make inferences from what they gather regarding the data collected and reflect critically. (Rhodes, 2011). Portfolio enhance definitely interaction between lecturers and students. Through the use of Portfolio, lecturers can trak their learners' progress and discover their students' talents and skills. *(Bashook, Gelula, Joshi, and Sandlow, 2008).*

3.2. *Advantages of Portfolio*

Educationalists encourage students who have cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and who have strong desire for presenting, and analyzing data. Dochy, (2001). Because of this view, alternative assessment methods are required especially in academic learning. In Benin, the Ministry of higher Education suggests more and more students 'independency and flexibility from lecturers regarding assessment.

Portfolio help learners to take part to their personal education which is an element of great motivation to study. (Akçil & Arap, 2009). Portfolio leads students to be more autonomous, to be in charge of their own future and sucess; it makes students have strong personality and to think critically. (Schmitz, Whitson, Heest & Maddaus, 2010). Colen et al. (2006: 108), has listed advantages for the student to use a portfolio. When well compiled, assessment is very reliable if it has the following criteria: first of all, Portfolio should help students assume the responsibility for their own learning for they have to be part of the evaluation process. In addition, portfolio should provide lecturers detailed information about students' work and progress. Thirdly, portfolio should motivate lecturers and students to introduce changes in the manner of teaching and learning, and finally, it should assist and give coherence to the information that students have prepared.

Gilman, Andrew (1998), discusses the advantages for the use of portfolio. Portfolios assess two components. It assesses both the final product and the learning process. Moreover, the assessment of portfolios does not consider a single score. Portfolio is a form of evaluation that is bounded to receive the lecturer's approval. They give more details about the student's growth, and motivates them to be responsible. Students have the impression to be part of the system. Portfolio has many benefits especially when the classroom is overcrowded. It leads to an improvement of the teaching-learning process. It makes students feel their responsibility through their own assessment, reflection, and experiences (Goldsmith, (2007).

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In the process of compiling the portfolio, students change their self-perspective. They start believing in themselves, developing self-confidence, becoming more responsible, caring, productive, creative, hardworking and active. They acquire self-discipline, skill and self-initiative.

Reflection, as the main element of the portfolio, helps and motivates students to trust their own talents, develops a positive self-image, a positive attitude towards learning as well as the subject and trains them for permanent education and citizenship. (Sentocnik, 2004: 74).

3.3. Disavantages of portfolios

Using portfolio is too demanding. For example, it requires compulsory tutorials, and more effort for lecturers than regular courses. It demands that all students are able to use certain tools, including ITC. It requires possessing varieties of skills (using different sources of information, knowing how to collect data, and information).

Therefore, it is important that every portfolio aims towards an objective and not only a compilation or a collection of random material, just like a meal is not only a mixture of randomly chosen foods, but a composition of well-chosen ingredients. However which kind of ingredients can be used for the different portfolio-dishes? To answer that question, Brown (2004: 256) suggests a list of students'work. Students should be involved in essays and compositions in draft and final forms; they may work on reports, project outlines; journals, diaries, and other personal reflections; notes on lectures, and peer-assessments. The selection of the materials is very important. Lecturers and students have to agree upon their choice. (Brown selection based on Brown 2004, 256).

McKay (2006: 159) and also Brown (2004: 256) support that the portfolio may also include some other aspects such as reflection or a personal statement of the student should be included to display a connection to the language learning process.

3.4. Portfolio at the University level

The choice of portfolio at the university level was a decision that has its root in three different theories of action. The first approach was the critical aspect of formative evaluation. (Atkinet al., 2005). The second approach was that lecturers leave their course and focus students' attention on revision as the main and important part of assessment objectives. (Diranna et al., 2007). The last approach focuses students'attention on the ongoing reflective practice. (Schön, 1987). Reflection was the key element for evaluation.

The selection of the use of portfolio at the university is appropriate for couple of reasons. First Portfolio impacts students'thinking and actions, boosts their self-confidence, Portfolios improve and reinforce students' beliefs in their own abilities, and motivate them in their progress of learning even after the end of their training. The use of portfolio at the university level generates more creativity from students. They are more productive and easily change their self-perspective. They acquire self-discipline, skill and self-initiative, and develop self-acceptance, become more responsible, caring, compassionate, and hardworking.

3.5. The content of portfolio

The different content of portfolio may include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit and evidence of student self-reflection.

Firstly, while dealing with the content of portfolio, it is crucial to determine its objective. Later the different items of its composition will be the focus of discussion with students. The objective should consider students'needs and the content of portfolio is not limited. Most of the time there are varieties of activities and specifically visual, projects, interview from lecturers; comment from colleagues, questionnaire, notes during the course, location of the schools and other universities. Thirdly, criteria and indicators should be established for assessing the portfolio. Items in the portfolio should be multi-dimensional and address different learning domains. It is important that portfolio display students' progress over the time.

Additional material which was not created by the student himself such as pictures of the areas visited, audio clips, newspaper or magazine clippings, personal statement or reflection of the student, critiques or summaries of reading, homework assignments, journal entries, peer responses to draw the connection to the language learning process can be added to the design.

3.6. Types of Portfolio

McKay (2006: 160) cites three different types of portfolio: The first one has to do with *process portfolio, the second relates to archival* and the third one is *aggregated* portfolio. The *process* portfolio displays a student's progress. It is a "work of the student growth in a period of time" and it addresses short-term goal. *Archival* portfolios on the other hand put the emphasis on selected works from the process portfolio. The third type, *the aggregated* portfolio, assembles work samples from all the students' portfolios and gives the lecturer the possibility to "assess writing (of older students). There is another type of portfolio known as Assessment portfolio. Its purpose is to document what the student has acquire over a period of time on specific subjects'outcomes. The aspects and the areas covered in the design of the portfolio should take into consideration the different outcomes. They may cover courses from the first chapter to the whole year. A group of subjects can also be considered.

3.7. Evaluation of portfolio

Prior to instruct students on the creation of portfolio, lecturers should consider couple of factors. Tangdhanakanonda & Wongwanichb (2015) have indicated that there are five different stages to follow while designing a portfolio. These included planning for evaluation, assembling created products and selecting them, assessing the products and using the outcomes from portfolio assessment.

In addition, a number of authors have undertaken research regarding students' beliefs on the use of portfolio. Yang, (2003) has conducted a study on 42 students. An open-ended Likert scale was used. From the study, it derived that the majority of students really appreciate the use of portfolio as a means of assessment.

4. Methodology

The researcher has used two groups. The first category of students was assigned to use portfolio as a means of evaluation. The second group of students was assessed traditionally. The researscher has considered 605 students in the field of Didactics. Subjects included in Didactics are: *Teaching Practice; Classroom Management; and Teaching methods.*

4.1. Research Procedure

The total number of students was divided into 2 groups. The first group of students (n=302) was trained and instructed on how to use a good portfolio. Samples of Portfolio were used so that students had an idea of what the lecturer was expecting from them. The second group of students (n= 303) was assessed regularly and traditionally. Overall **605 students in the field of Didactics** and **twelve EFL** lecturers in Didactics participated in this research study. Comparison was established to check on the different results. Two Universities were involved in the study: Abomey-Calavi and Adjarra campus.

4.2. Research Instruments

Questionnaire, interview and class observation in amphitheaters were the instruments used for this research study. The present research aimed to investigate students' attitudes toward Alternative Assessment Methods in Didactics. There were 16 items in the main questionnaire, using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1= "Totally Disagree", 2 = "Disagree", 3= "Neutral", 4= "Agree", 5= "Totally Agree".
Table 1 indicates the question design of the main questionnaire. (See Appendix A) The items examined the students' general attitude toward their belief about portfolio. The statements were organized into rubrics: the *materials used, students' kwoledge and the improvement gained, students' feelings on the use of portfolio, and the discussion on the content of portfolio.*
The interview questions were addressed to students who were selected randomly. Criteria and indicators were established to check the way students compiled their projects, the availability of the materials, of the rooms, and the interaction between the lecturers, and the students.

5. Analysis of the questionnaire results

Dealing with rubric 1 on the time of the design, the majority of participants (90%) agreed on the fact that it took too much time to prepare portfolio. As for the materials, item 16 indicated that it was difficult for students to obtain materials for the compilation of their work. 58% students felt comfortable while collecting data for their project, while 42 % totally disagreed. Assess to papers, binders, and other facilities was extremely difficult. The percentage shows 51% strongly disagreed with the statement. Only 49% of participants can afford obtaining the materials. Statistically, the result corrolates with some participants'beliefs in their interview. They expressed their view on the difficulties they faced to possess their own computer for the different reports,

lack of money for the printing service, lack of transport to move from place to place in order to collect adequate data.

In terms of their improvement, 88 % assured they were more knowledgeable on their courses in Didactics. 77% of the students have the feeling that they are more than their own learning. 68%of students thought my skills in EFL, especially writing have been developed with portfolio. Moreover, 91% of them discovered that they could undertake research and read many articles related to their domain. 100% claimed that their score improved and allowed them to eliminate the teaching unit. Also, they avoided having a retake session. 87% believed they were more confident and I felt they could learn alone. 98% of students felt themself more independent by using portfolio. Regarding their knowledge, 75% of the participants confirmed they learned more on the ground with their classroom management. 90% of the participants strongly agreed they overcome the exam anxiety when they were evaluated with portfolio.

When it comes to determine the content of portfolio, 57% strongly agreed on the content of portfolio with their lecturer, while 43% disagreed. This result shows that lecturers need to be trained on the selection of the content of portfolio. The content of portfolio should be discussed and adapted to the learning environment and reality. Assistance should be provided in terms of information, guidelines, and limitations of some chapters.

5.1.   Results from the Conventional Evaluation

The analysis of the two tables indicated a strong correlation between the variables. University 1, in the South displayed approximatively the same results with university 2. The results were analyzed after the retake exam, this means the deliberation decision on the redemption has already been applied and students who obtained the average would be rescued. The remaining students who failed will eventuaally come for the next year.

Table 1: Scores of students tested conventionally (University 1)

Subjects	Mean	Frequency
Classroom Management	187	53.27%
Teaching Practice	145	41.31%
Teaching Methods	121	34.47%

Table 2: Scores of students tested conventionally (University 2)

Subjects	Mean	Frequency
Classroom Management	161	49.23%
Teaching Practice	177	54.12%
Teaching Methods	127	38.83%

From the results, there was a significant difference between students who have used portfolio and those who were regularly tested traditionnally. Overall from 302 students involved in the study and in the first university 251 confessed they liked the use of portfolio and felt comfortable with it. The second University involved 303. 193 turned that they really appreciated the use of portfolio as a means of assessment.

Table 3: Degree of satisfaction of students on the use of portfolio

Universities	University 1	University 2	Frequency
Students Involved	302	303	83.11%
Satisfaction	251	193	63.69%

5.2. *Students'beliefs about the use of portfolio*

For the first question, students were please to use portfolio for their final. Several reasons were provided. They felt relaxed and there was an absence of pressure from the lecturers. They also turned that they could manage their time to organize data. Reading different articles from authors provide a deep insight on the concepts received during the course

As for question two, Students have expressed their satisfaction in the use of a portfolio. They have indicated that the method was interesting. It did not require pressure and the design of portfolio generated less stress. The majority of students would like the generalization of this type of assessment for the other teaching units. Here are the feelings of three students about the question.

Student 1: "My perception of learning has changed a lot. I thought I could not make it, but finally it was a passionate project".

Student 2: "For the first time, when I saw the sample of the binding, and the volume, I was convinced that it would be pretty much impossible to compile all those papers. After the training, I realized how interesting it was. Portfolio, for me is even easy to realize than to read and memorize theories".

Student 3: "The fact that I attended some classes on the ground provided me with a great insight of what was going on in the classroom regarding teaching practices especially for the course of Classroom Management. I acquired varieties of teaching technics and I am able to establish comparison between the teaching methods in EFL.

For the main negative aspects, they observed in the use of a portfolio, students were exposed to difficulties such as time constraints, lack of materials, of transport to move from school to school in order to collect data, and lack of rooms for research.

Three students reported the following feelings:

Student 1: "*I was submitted to a number of difficulties. The main one was in buying papers and editing some of the information I obtain from the schools. I was obliged to work with the vice principal of my internship school who helped me out with all these*".

Student 2: "*Having collected papers, and necessary information was a step, being able to organize ideas in a binder, using design papers, utilizing the printing facilities, taking appropriate pictures, and having the means for transport was another step, and I could not afford them*".

Student 3: "*The realization of a portfolio is time consuming, but could I have possessed more materials, I would have done a great job*".

For the fourth question, students confessed they would definitely recommend the use of portfolio as a means of evaluation to other students and for other subjects, provided that all of them got financial assistance from the university.

Finally, in terms of the assistance you received from your lecturers, students confessed they were more or less satisfied. 73%students from the two universities claimed they were satisfied with lecturers' support.

5.3. Result from class observation

Prior to the observation, the researcher worked collaboratively with the English Department to obtain information about the way assessment was organized at the University level. The researcher has also checked the conditions of the assessment, the contents of each course, and the methods used to test students. The file and the reports on the examinations was used carefully to analyze students' scores about the three different subjects in English Didactics.

From the observation, it can be noticed that students attended courses, followed lecturers' guidelines and instructions. The Department used the conventional way of organizing the assessment, and students composed for their final. Components of the assessment are around multiple-choice questions (MCQ) and WH -questions.
The analysis of the file and reports has clearly indicated that students were not successful regarding to the subjects pre selected. The mean score was low and a minority of students really obtained the average.
The observation at the two universities, and specifically for lecturers who involved students in using portfolio has generated positive and negative aspects. As for the positive points, there was a great solidarity among students. There was an assistance from all lecturers toward students during the exchange. From the 12 lecturers, 08 succeeded in explaining the types of information required for the portfolio. 06 lecturers provided a sample so that students used it for their production. A great number of students surprised the researcher with their photos inserted in their portfolio during their internship in the remote villages. The atmosphere was relaxed and the researcher has noticed a great motivation from students' attitudes to participate in selecting the titles of the websites needed for their projects, the different areas of concerns for their internship.

For the negative aspects, there was an issue about transportation. The majority of students can not afford buying mortorcycles or use the local taxi for the collection of data in the selected schools for their research. Also, the unique bus was not available for the first University (Adjarra Campus). Access to internet was difficult for some students. Lack of materials to compile adequately journals, and articles selected from the internet.

6. Pedagogical implications and Discussion

This research examines Benin EFL Students'Attitudes toward Alternative Assessment Methods in Didactics: Portfolio Implementation at Universities. It is important that the Ministry of Higher Education assists Students at the University level with the Provision of support in terms of materials. Papers especially designed papers should be allocated to the Department of English. The cost for printing should be minimize so that each student feels comfortable in getting all the manuals they may need for their reseach. Simple binders should be asked as a requirement. This may become an obligation for the students at the beginning of the course. However, the computers rooms and free assess to internet may help the majority of students to stay on campus for their research. This will also lower the issue of transport. It is also urgent that universities got amphitheaters. The construction of additional rooms may help lecturers in establishing sub-groups for activities.

From the 12 lecturers, 08 succeeded in explaining the types of information required for the portfolio. 06 lecturers provided a sample so that students used it for their production. Thus, another important suggestion is in the training of pre-service lecturers about using an assessment tool of the portfolio. Training of its use may start at the beginning of the semester. This will impact positively Benin education system during their education and will be introduce for lecturers with the help of in- service courses. Senior lecturers may include strategies that support intrinsic motivation, especially those that manifest the value and usefulness of portfolios.

The implementation of academic portfolio for EFL students in Benin may generate a couple of issues. The first issue is to analyze the needs. Lecturers should introduce the use of portfolio as a means of assessment progressively. The second issue is in the storage of portfolio. Students' production should be kept in an area where everybody has access. Most of the time the availability of rooms is limited. Thirdly due to the weakness and poor foundation of students in the domain of writing skills, many of them compile work and literature that do not belong to their own research. This situation is in line with the interview directed to students. The fifth issue derived from the lack of collaboration among experienced lecturers and non experienced ones. This did not favor really the exchange and the criteria to consider for a good assessment. The sixth limitation for this study was about the course contents. The load of information received by students was too heavy and there is a need to reduce the content of the courses. While visiting the amphitheaters and some courses, it was an evidence that students do not come and do not attend classes reguparly. This situation affected somehow the results for the students who were tested conventionally. The last issue was about the environment and the language. The Language barrier was a

challenge which made portfolio a new burden upon the EFL students. Finally, having conference with students once before the end of the semester may assist them have a general idea about their progress. Research revealed that the design of portfolio, especially at the university requires additional time. Harmer, (2007) pointed out that portfolio, not only demands more time on the part of the lecturer as compared to the conventional assessment method, but also, they are time consuming for the student. Mokhataria, (2015) put his critics on the use of portfolio and indicated that the majority of parents or community may not appreciate the use of portfolio as a means of assessment because it's sounds unfamiliar and not pedagogical.

Conclusion

The study showed that the portfolios proved to be a good tool as a means of assessment at both public universities. It showed that preparation of portfolio helps students to become more productive, improve their critical thinking skills, understand their strengths and limitations, and improve communication between lecturers and parents. In addition, for the students who were assessed by portfolio, it was found that there is a great significant difference between students'attitudes and their achievements. The findings from the experimental group have indicated that the scores and the performances of students were higher than those in the control group. However, findings revealed that students need assistance and support from their universities to perform well in their design. Implementing the use of portfolio will obviously reduce time consuming for the selected subjects, since they remain the teaching units and compulsory for students to succeed. Also, some aspects such as the training of lecturers in the domain will enhance the generalization of the implementation at the other universities in the whole country. But it is an evidence that the conventional assessment should not be completely forgotten for some subjects.

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