



## Learning-Oriented Portfolio Assessment in Business English: A Focused Review and Research Agenda

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### Abstract

Learning-oriented assessment (LOA) has emerged as a paradigm that reconceptualizes assessment as an integral part of the learning process. Portfolio-based assessment (PBA), particularly in digital formats, operationalizes LOA through authentic tasks, feedback cycles, and learner reflection. While PBA has been widely studied in EFL and general literacy contexts, its application in Business English, a critical domain within English for Specific Purposes (ESP), remains underexplored. This focused review synthesizes theoretical and empirical insights from key works to articulate how digital portfolio assessment supports LOA principles in Business English. Drawing on LOA frameworks and international models such as the PBLA (Portfolio-Based Language Assessment) and digital portfolios in EFL, the review identifies alignment points, tensions, and implications for implementation in Southeast Asian EFL contexts, with emphasis on Vietnam. It concludes with a set of targeted research directions to guide future inquiry.

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### 1. Introduction

Business English occupies a distinctive position within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) due to its strong emphasis on authenticity, professional communication, and workplace relevance. Learners are expected to perform complex communicative tasks such as the writing of business letters, the making of presentations, participation in meetings, and the negotiation of dealings accomplishable in the workplace. Thus, evaluations in Business English must go far beyond the mere discrete knowledge of linguistics in order to reflect students' competencies to use language in a strategically, contextually appropriate, and effective manner, in the business environments of today. However, as there is a demand, there operational practices of classroom assessments in many Business English classes, and particularly in the EFL context, still appears to be examinations and tests. The learning of the instructional practices is to be measured supposedly in a quiz, a test, or a performance set, often in isolation; the performance of which does not in any way reveal any significant connections to learning which is taking place in the classroom at a point in time. The interaction of teaching and assessment is the target of the greatest interest in educational assessment, and in this case, educational assessment is reconsidered as learning assessment. Learning-oriented assessment presents a structured answer to the problem, suggesting that the primary function of an assessment is to support learning instead of simply serving as a measurement (Turner & Purpura, 2016) <sup>[1]</sup>.

Online portfolio assessment has been suggested as an approach that incorporates Learning-oriented assessment principles through continual collection of evidence, feedback, and self-reflection by the learner, based on research exploring assessment-for-learning and formative assessment (Black and Wiliam, 1998; Leahy *et al.*, 2005; Zhang, 2024) <sup>[5, 9, 12]</sup>. Grounded on these thoughts, this paper investigates the conceptualisation of learning-orientated portfolio assessment in the context of Business English teaching and learning.

## 2. Review Scope and Methodological Approach

Given the relatively limited and fragmented body of research on learning-oriented assessment, a focused review was considered more appropriate than a full systematic or scoping review. This approach allows a detailed and comprehensive conceptual synthesis and theory building, especially on the thinly studied areas of ESP, where there are few empirical studies and are extremely context-rich. Based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) <sup>[2]</sup> methodological reference for scoping studies, this focused review adopted a systematic, but concept-based approach to contouring and synthesizing the most important body of literature on assessment of learning portfolios. Instead of attempting to a complete body of literature review, the purpose of the review was to identify and understand the most contextually relevant and theoretically informing studies to elucidate the conceptual interrelations and to guide future research.

Based on the transparency and coherence rather than the procedural completeness of the review, the guidelines provided in the PRISMA-ScR framework (Tricco *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[10]</sup> were employed to report the findings. Scopus was searched to identify relevant studies covering the years 2010 to 2024. This review focused on studies addressing assessment of portfolios, learning-oriented assessment, and digital portfolio practice. Studies were selected in order to reflect the theory and the practice from the classroom. When synthesising the literature, special attention was given to two pivotal studies, Zhang (2024) <sup>[12]</sup> and Abbott *et al.* (2021) <sup>[1]</sup>, which laid the initial conceptual and analytical groundwork for the review.

## 3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

### 3.1. Learning-Oriented Assessment in Language Education

Learning-oriented assessment posits that assessment is a process that should serve the needs of learners through appropriate task design, feedback, and learner engagement. Instead of portraying formative and summative assessment as dichotomies, LOA views them as integrated functions focused on using assessment for the development of learners (Turner & Purpura, 2016) <sup>[11]</sup>. In LOA models, learning of the language is the product of an assessment task and the task is to provide feedback on the language used, which informs the learner on the language goals they should pursue. Feedback is an essential component of the assessment process as learners can notice the gap between where they are and where they should be, and self-regulate their learning. The learners' autonomy and self-regulation, which are ideal for workplace and professional language learning, should be developed through goal setting and involving them in peer and self-assessment.

### 3.2. Portfolio-Based Assessment and Digital Portfolios

Portfolios have been seen as effective ways of capturing learner progress and aiding reflective learning for some time now. In language education, they are characterized as time-ordered, systematic compilations of learner work that may comprise written and oral texts, reflective journals, and various forms of self and peer assessments (Johnson *et al.*, 2010) <sup>[8]</sup>.

Digital portfolios build on these traditional functions as they allow the collection of diverse artifacts, continuous refinements of added materials, and the incorporation of feedback. Studies focused on learning-oriented digital

portfolios have surfaced the developmental, interactive, and continuous nature of these tools and how they support the integration of assessment and learning (Zhang, 2024) <sup>[12]</sup>. Significantly, digital portfolios enhance learner agency as they allow for the identification of assessment criteria, and enable students to interact with feedback and reflection rather than receive grades.

### 3.3. Portfolio-Based Language Assessment and LOA Alignment

Research on Portfolio-based language assessment from the perspective of LOA shows some degree of conceptual convergence between the two. Abbott, Lee, & Ricioppo (2021) <sup>[1]</sup>, in their study on Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA), show how portfolios can capture several dimensions of LOA, including learning, interactional, and affective, while also exposing entry points of tensions between formative purposes and accountability-driven assessment practices (Bachman & Palmer, 2010) <sup>[3]</sup>.

To their credit, however, the findings also point out the tensions between learning-driven objectives and the accountability push from the institution. If portfolios are used mostly as high-stakes assessment, their formative and developmental aspects are likely curtailed, leading to an emphasis on assessment of learning, rather than assessment for learning. In EFL contexts, this will likely be the case where the documentation of portfolios may be viewed as an administrative exercise rather than a pedagogical one.

### 3.4. Business English as a Distinct Assessment Context

What makes the teaching of Business English a unique case for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is its focus on professional discourse, workplace communication, and real-life communication situations. Under supervision, learners perform activities such as business letter writing, presentation making, and meeting moderation, where success is determined by the communicative and strategic competence of the participants (Bhatia, 2004; Douglas, 2000) <sup>[4, 6]</sup>. Conventional test-based assessments, resulting from their general focus on genres, do not consider the specific and evolving nature of Business English communication.

In contrast, the collection of Business English learning portfolios encourages the systematic gathering of learners' performances with each document representing a specific business genre, such that assessment is synchronized with the unfolding of professional communicative competence. Portfolios positioned professionally, with a focus on communication, and accompanied by self-assessment, support learners in the construction of their professional identities (Hyland, 2007; Turner & Purpura, 2016) <sup>[7, 11]</sup>. Portfolio-based assessments respond efficiently and coherently to the challenges of Business English assessment.

## 4. Implications and Research Agenda for Business English In Vietnam

There has been little research conducted that focuses on Business English, especially in the context of Southeast Asia and Vietnam, even though there is growing global curiosity about assessment carried out for the sake of learning and about practices that include portfolios. This is not a limitation, but an opportunity for research that is theoretically grounded and sensitive to the context. There are some new and exciting ways to conduct research in Business English education in Vietnam that can stem from the synthesis of

learning-oriented assessment and portfolio assessment frameworks. For starters, there is a pressing need for classroom research that investigates the ways in which learning-oriented portfolio assessment transforms the communicative competence, engagement levels, and professional identity of Business English learners. In the context of Vietnamese higher education and the way Business English courses are typically seen as intermediaries between academia and the job market, portfolios enable the examination of language development as a process that is situated within an authentic context and that is developmental, rather than as a set of disjointed performances. There is perhaps no better way to understand the outcomes of students assessing the various criteria for a given task, interacting with the criteria in feedback dialogues, and making improvements to their work in multiple revisions, than to use qualitative research approaches that include long-term participatory classroom observation, student interviews, and analysis of documents from their portfolios. Such research will not only inform on the state of the learners' language skills, but also on their evolving notions of professionalism, the discourse community of the workplace, and their identity as a business communicator.

Third, more investigation should be done concerning teachers and learners' literacy assessments relating to portfolio assessments and learning. Assessments have traditionally focused on high-stakes exams in Vietnam. This tradition likely affects the understanding and practical use of portfolios. There is research analyzing how teachers focus on learning when assessing and how this focus is shown in task design, feedback, and grading. This focus is vital to the practical sustainability of portfolio assessments. Learners' literacy assessments also need to be examined, especially their perceptions of self and peer assessments. Vietnamese learners' understanding of portfolio systems and their assessment roles can provide insight to help develop meaningful autonomy instead of just superficial freedom. Fourth, more and more research could be conducted on the technology and institutional frameworks on which the use of digital portfolios in Business English classes is based. Digital platforms, designed to enhance innovative assessment, should be more thoroughly examined for their contextual influences, including class size, teaching workload, institutional assessment policies, technology.

Investigating different empirical studies in relation to digital portfolio platforms and how teachers adapt processes will help us understand how to construct context-sensitive frameworks for designing Business English programs in Vietnam. This would answer questions beyond technology to how sustained learning-oriented assessment can be maintained in a given situational context. This study would be particularly relevant and impactful with respect to portfolio assessment and workplace communication in Vietnam or Business English studies. Business English reflective portfolios can act as a bridge to practitioners but this potential has not yet been fully utilized. Studies following Business English learners into workplaces or internships and capturing their experiences would be extremely useful as they would allow us to understand whether the communicative tasks within the portfolio were reflective of real workplace needs, and whether the learners were able to transfer the skills beyond academic contexts. This would help understand the academic value of learning-oriented portfolios as well as the broader advocacy for the

value of ESP when considering employability and professional readiness within shifting economies.

These lines opened the theoretical door to the portfolio assessment of learning relevant to Business English in Vietnam. When we consider the assessment culture in Vietnam, the educational context, the need for communication in the workplace, and the value of Business English in today's world, the educational and workforce communication needs in Vietnam become priorities, and further research will contribute to the scholarship in English for Specific Purposes.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has presented a focused conceptual review of learning-oriented assessment and its relevance to Business English instruction. Drawing primarily on previous key research, the review has highlighted the theoretical alignment between portfolio-based assessment and learning-oriented assessment, as well as key pedagogical affordances and challenges.

While issues related to learner readiness, teacher workload, and institutional constraints remain, learning-oriented portfolio assessment offers a promising framework for enhancing coherence between teaching and assessment in Business English, particularly in EFL contexts such as Vietnam. The research directions outlined in this paper aim to support future empirical work that can further contextualize and refine learning-oriented portfolio practices within ESP education.

Beyond its implications for Business English pedagogy, this focused review contributes to broader discussions on how learning-oriented assessment can be operationalized in ESP contexts where authenticity, professional identity, and institutional accountability intersect. By foregrounding portfolio-based assessment as both a pedagogical and research lens, the paper invites further exploration of assessment not merely as measurement, but as a site of professional learning and identity formation in language education.

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