

Implementing LIM ePortfolios to Enhance Student Agency and Assessment in
Elementary Education

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Abstract

This literature review explores how the use of Leader in Me (LIM) ePortfolios can support student agency and rethink how we use assessments in elementary education. The LIM framework promotes critical thinking through its use of self-reflection and goal setting activities while equipping students with valuable leadership qualities. Traditional assessment methods often prioritize rote memorization and standardized metrics, limiting opportunities for authentic, student-centered learning. In contrast, LIM ePortfolios provide a digital platform that fosters student ownership, reflection, and voice—core principles of the COVA (Choice, Ownership, Voice, Authenticity) framework. Based on current research, the review shows how ePortfolios support goal-setting, metacognition, personalized learning, and real-world application. It also addresses the practical considerations of transitioning from physical Leadership Notebooks to digital formats, highlighting sustainability, platform selection, and active involvement from stakeholders. Ultimately, the review shows the potential of ePortfolios to not only document but also deepen student learning, offering a more inclusive alternative to traditional assessment models.

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Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving educational landscape, technology continues to redefine how students learn and how educators teach. These shifts extend beyond content delivery to the transformation of learning experiences, particularly in fostering student ownership, reflection, and voice. These elements are foundational for success in the 21st century, especially in elementary education, where learners form the habits and skills that shape their future.

One emerging innovation is the implementation of Leader in Me (LIM) ePortfolios, which build upon the established practice of Leadership Notebooks. These digital portfolios provide students a space to document their growth, set and track goals, and reflect on their learning journey. My interest in this topic stems from a desire to align authentic, student-centered learning practices with modern assessment methods. Traditional assessments often prioritize standardized metrics and overlook the individual development of students. In contrast, LIM ePortfolios offer a dynamic, flexible, and student-driven approach to assessment.

This review explores the literature surrounding ePortfolios in education, focusing on how they can enhance student agency and reshape assessment practices in elementary schools. My guiding research question is: How can the implementation of LIM ePortfolios enhance student agency and transform assessment practices in elementary education?

Review of the Literature

Definition of ePortfolios

An ePortfolio is a digital collection of a student's work, including written reflections, academic projects, creative assignments, and personal goals. According to the University of Waterloo (2017), ePortfolios can also include extracurricular achievements and real-world experiences, offering a comprehensive view of student growth. Unlike traditional assessments that provide only a snapshot of achievement, ePortfolios offer a longitudinal, multifaceted view of student learning and development.

Types of ePortfolios

Leadership Notebooks

Within the Leader in Me framework, Leadership Notebooks serve as a physical tool that students use to track goals and progress over time. These notebooks include space for reflections, goal-setting, and showcasing work. While valuable, their limitations include lack of multimedia integration and challenges in storage and access.

Digital Academic ePortfolios

Digital ePortfolios address these limitations by providing an accessible and media-rich platform for student learning. Students can include videos, presentations, images, and audio files, allowing for a broader representation of learning. This format encourages creativity and reflection, supporting both formative and summative assessment.

Advantages of Using ePortfolios

ePortfolios support student agency by promoting metacognition and reflection. Wakelet (2023) highlights how students become more aware of their learning through regular self-assessment and goal tracking. This deepens their understanding and allows them to make informed decisions about their academic progress.

They also provide a structure for goal-setting and self-regulation. Paris and Paris (2001) link self-regulated learning with increased motivation and personal accountability. By enabling students to document goals and reflect on progress, ePortfolios create an environment where learners manage their own development. Tyson (2020) connects this with the Leader in Me model, emphasizing accountability within one's circle of control.

Moreover, ePortfolios align naturally with the COVA framework—Choice, Ownership, Voice, and Authenticity. As Harapnuik (2018) notes, when students can make choices and express their voice in how they demonstrate learning, they develop a deeper connection to their work. ePortfolios give students authentic ways to reflect on and present their learning in meaningful, individualized formats.

Barriers to Implementing ePortfolios

Despite their benefits, transitioning to digital portfolios involves several challenges. Time and resource management is one significant barrier. Teachers need training and ongoing support to effectively implement ePortfolios in the classroom. Summers et al. (2020) emphasize the role of administrative backing and professional development in the success of portfolio initiatives.

Another challenge is platform selection and setup. For elementary students, platforms must be developmentally appropriate, user-friendly, and compatible with school systems. Choosing the wrong platform can hinder usability and frustrate both students and teachers.

Sustainability also poses a barrier. Maintaining ePortfolios across grade levels requires consistent protocols and collaboration among educators. Without a clear system for progression, students may lose access to prior work or struggle with organization. Ensuring longevity and coherence is critical for the success of this initiative.

Transforming Assessment Practices Through ePortfolios

LIM ePortfolios offer a compelling alternative to traditional testing methods, which often focus on memorization and isolated skills (Amplifire, 2025). ePortfolios support authentic assessment, allowing students to demonstrate mastery through real-world applications, projects, and multimedia storytelling.

This transformation also helps teachers personalize feedback and tailor instruction. Rather than applying one-size-fits-all rubrics, educators can assess students based on their growth and individual progress. As Sackstein (2024) argues, portfolios allow for continuous, evidence-based evaluation that highlights both academic and personal development.

By aligning with the COVA framework, ePortfolios create a more dynamic, inclusive, and engaging learning environment. Students become co-creators of their education, taking pride in their work and developing critical digital and reflective skills that extend beyond the classroom.

Summary

In summary, implementing LIM ePortfolios in elementary education presents a promising opportunity to enhance student agency, promote reflective learning, and modernize assessment practices. These digital tools empower students to take ownership of their learning, allowing them to document, reflect, and showcase their growth in meaningful and personalized ways. While there are challenges to consider—such as platform selection, sustainability, and training—current literature supports the value of ePortfolios as a student-centered, authentic approach to learning and assessment. By aligning with the COVA framework and emphasizing the development of metacognitive and digital skills, ePortfolios can transform traditional classroom practices into dynamic, engaging learning environments that prepare students for future success.

This Review and the Field of Education

This literature review contributes to the field of education by highlighting the transformative potential of digital portfolios, specifically LIM ePortfolios, in elementary classrooms. It reinforces the importance of fostering student agency and rethinking assessment practices in ways that promote deeper learning, self-reflection, and goal setting. As educational institutions continue to shift toward more student-centered and technology-integrated environments, the insights from this review offer practical guidance for implementing sustainable and effective digital tools. By grounding the use of ePortfolios in well-established frameworks like COVA and connecting them to self-regulated learning theory, this review provides educators and school leaders with a research-informed approach to enhancing student outcomes.

Strengths of this Body of Literature

A major strength of the literature reviewed is its focus on student-centered learning and the integration of digital tools to support reflective practice and personalized learning. The literature draws on multiple frameworks, such as COVA and self-regulated learning, to provide theoretical support for ePortfolio implementation. Studies also emphasize the practical benefits of ePortfolios, such as multimedia integration, student engagement, and improved assessment accuracy. The wide range of sources—from academic studies to practical educational guidelines—strengthens the argument for incorporating ePortfolios in elementary education and aligns with broader educational goals, such as digital literacy and authentic learning.

Weaknesses of this Body of Literature

While the literature on ePortfolios is promising, one weakness is the limited focus on elementary education specifically. Much of the existing research is concentrated on higher education or secondary settings, with fewer studies dedicated to the unique challenges and developmental needs of younger learners. There is also a lack of longitudinal data demonstrating the sustained impact of ePortfolio use over multiple school years. Additionally, the literature does not consistently address issues of equity, such as access to technology or teacher preparedness, which are critical for successful implementation in diverse school environments.

Focus of the Current Study

This literature review directly informs my current action research project, which focuses on implementing LIM ePortfolios to increase student agency and improve assessment practices in elementary education. The insights gained will guide the development of a structured, student-centered implementation plan that includes training, platform selection, and integration

strategies. Emphasizing metacognition, student voice, and authentic learning, the study aims to create sustainable systems that promote reflective learning and personalized goal setting. By applying what I've learned from this literature, I hope to develop a model for digital portfolio use that enhances both student outcomes and instructional practices in my educational context.

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