

Putting ePortfolios into Practice

Willingness of School Principals to Use the ePortfolio as a Hiring Tool in Poland and Spain

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Monika Ciesielkiewicz ^(✉)

Villanueva-Complutense University of Madrid, Spain
mciesielkiewicz@villanueva.edu

Claire Frances Bonilla

Madrid Open University (UDIMA), Madrid, Spain

Carlos Olave López de Ayala

Global HR at LG Electronics, Seoul, South Korea

Abstract—The ePortfolio has been used extensively in education in various countries and for diverse career paths. It is a dynamic platform that students can use to compile and formulate a digital presentation using different types of media which can be updated and adapted for distinct purposes and audiences. Because the ePortfolio is, by nature, flexible and adaptable, it can be developed over the course of a student's studies and be easily incorporated into professional networking platforms as a job search tool. The objective of this study was to assess and compare the willingness of school principals from Poland and Spain to use the ePortfolio as a hiring tool. The authors also sought to ascertain whether the number of employees in the participants' schools or previous contact with ePortfolio affected their opinion of it as a hiring tool. Participants took a survey after reviewing examples of career ePortfolios, and their answers were tabulated and analyzed. The results show that principals from both countries would be inclined to use the ePortfolio as a hiring tool, and that neither previous contact nor number of employees significantly affected their opinion. These results are significant as they demonstrate a broad willingness to implement the ePortfolio as a hiring tool, that was not significantly affected by country or size of school. It is also relevant that this broad support was shared by principals who were unfamiliar with the ePortfolio before participating in this study.

Keywords—ePortfolio, hiring tool, employability, educational technology.

1 Introduction

The ePortfolio has been used extensively in higher education in diverse countries [1][2] and is widespread in many disciplines, such as pre-service teacher education [3-6], musical education [7], fine arts [8], vocational higher education training [9], occupational therapy [10], nursing [11], social work [12], accounting [13] and business studies [2][14].

As stated in Ref. [2], the ePortfolio is defined as “an electronic collection of meaningful artefacts which provides evidence of learning, competencies and employability” (p. 16). The ePortfolios was also credited with promoting students’ learning and helping them to become self-reflective critical thinkers and lifelong learners [2].

As confirmed in Ref. [15], the ePortfolio assists students in developing crucial cognitive skills, as well as a disciplined mind. Additionally, graduate students who used ePortfolio in their capstone courses developed critical thinking, self-directed learning and leadership skills [16]. The participants of this study also acknowledged that the ePortfolio “provided lenses through which to reflect on their own professional development and accomplishments in new ways” (Ref. [16], p. 69). Furthermore, a study on ePortfolio use among students who took business communication courses, revealed that the ePortfolio fosters self-awareness and active learning, as well as professional identity [17]. Moreover, several researchers identified skills and competences that can be developed through ePortfolios such as goal setting, collaborative learning, autonomous learning, self-assessment skills, reflective skills, digital literacy, digital identity, work readiness, professional identity, self-management, and lifelong learning [18-24]. Other potential benefits of the ePortfolios for students are: “enhanced learning experiences and outcomes; enhanced employability; enhanced career development; enhanced professional identity and judgement making” (Ref. [2], p. 24).

1.1 Research questions

The purpose of this paper is to examine whether school principals in Poland and Spain would use an ePortfolio for recruitment purposes. The following research questions were explored:

RQ1. Would school principals use an ePortfolio to select candidates for a job at some stage of the recruitment process?

RQ2. Would school principals make the effort to review only the ePortfolio of the best candidate for a job?

RQ3. Would school principals make the effort to review the ePortfolio of the three best candidates for a job?

RQ4. Would school principals make an effort to review the ePortfolios of all candidates to select the best one for a job?

RQ5. Do school principals consider the ePortfolios a useful tool to obtain wider and more detailed information on candidates who apply for a job?

1.2 The ePortfolio as a hiring tool

Even though there is not a long history of the ePortfolio being used as a hiring tool [25], there have been a number of interesting studies that point to a promising future in this domain. There is evidence that students getting ready to enter the workforce benefit from the process of making their career ePortfolio. The reflection necessary to develop an ePortfolio can help students make better educational and career-related decisions [24]. Likewise, by organizing their skills and achievements into an ePortfolio the students not only have digital artefacts of their learning, but also formulate how to explain or present their qualifications to a prospective employer [26]. Additionally, students that used an ePortfolio performed better in mock interviews because they could effectively communicate their achievements [27].

Interest in the ePortfolio from the business world is growing [28][14]. In research performed for the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) more than 80% of the employers interviewed considered the ePortfolio a useful hiring tool [29]. Subsequent to the publication of the aforementioned AAC&U study, Human Resources recruiters from large employers were recruited for a focus group, in which it was discovered that 72% of these recruiters considered the ePortfolio to be a valuable hiring tool [30].

Employers can use the ePortfolio in multiple ways. As research in Ref. [31] shows, employers were found to be far more likely to use the ePortfolio for initial screening of potential new hires, than for post interview in-depth analysis. Still other research shows that the ePortfolio could offer insights into candidates' creativity and personality, as well as to whether or not the candidate would be able to form part of a team [32]. Ninety percent of professional recruiters interviewed in one study indicated that they would view an ePortfolio if a link were sent in a followup email [30]. These recruiters considered ePortfolio to be a valuable recruiting tool, however, they also stated that it was secondary to excellent interview skills [30]. Furthermore, some recruiters pinpoint the following advantages of ePortfolios over traditional recruitment methods: "personalised body of learning evidence; examples of skills; learning style and preferences; the lens through which they view the world/life; communication tool; 'richer' format of evidence; helps make connections; a greater sense of softer skills" ([14], p. 28). Additionally, ePortfolios offer more personalization and a more complete view of a job applicant than a traditional resumé [17].

On the other hand, time constraint is reported as one of the major complaints about the use of ePortfolio as a recruiting tool [14][31][33][34]. It has been suggested that Learning Analytics could be used to mitigate the time investment that is considered by some to be prohibitive, thereby unlocking the ePortfolio's full potential [35]. Learning Analytics could be used to analyze and assess artefacts included in an ePortfolio, which could generate feedback regarding acquisition of key competences [1]. The implications of this type of analysis is that it would allow an automated scan of artefacts created by the student or job candidate, in order to determine if there is evidence of concrete competences. As such, this could, in part, resolve the argument that reviewing ePortfolios for job candidates is a time consuming process. It must be

noted that this type of assessment for decision making could give rise to ethical concerns [36].

Though there is no consensus as to what stage of the recruitment process employers would consult candidates' ePortfolios, there is consistent interest in this tool for hiring purposes. As has been observed, the ePortfolio generates a substantial and steady interest among employers and seems set for a promising future [28][37].

2 Methodology

2.1 Participants

The participants were 56 school principals from Spain ($n = 23$) and Poland ($n = 33$). They anonymously participated in this study during 2016 (Spanish group) and 2017 (Polish group). The participants were principals of private schools that belong to a Spanish educational organization founded in 1963 and operate primary and secondary schools in Spain and in various countries around the world. This organization began opening schools in Poland relatively recently.

2.2 Instrument and procedures

At the beginning of the survey, participants were given links to four different career ePortfolios. All four ePortfolios were from the United States where 54% of students used some sort of ePortfolio [38]. Two of the ePortfolios belonged to recent graduates, who were starting their professional careers and the other two ePortfolios belonged to established professionals. Once having viewed these career ePortfolios, the participants responded to a seven-item survey that gathered information about the number of employees at their school, whether they had had previous contact with ePortfolio, their willingness to use an ePortfolio as part of their recruitment process for new hires and their opinion about the usefulness of the ePortfolio as a hiring tool. This last section was comprised of five closed-ended questions that asked participants to gauge their agreement with a statement on a seven-point Likert-type scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). These items were chosen and adapted from surveys that had been validated in previous research [29][39].

3 Results

The school principals were asked to indicate how many employees were in their respective schools. The answers ranged from five to 250 employees. To facilitate statistical analysis, responses were grouped in increments of 25, ranging from 1-25 to 226-250. Figure 1 shows the responses grouped by country. It is interesting to note that 57.6% of the Polish principals represented schools with 25 employees or less,

which may be due to the fact that the aforementioned educational organization had just recently begun operating in Poland. See Figure 1.

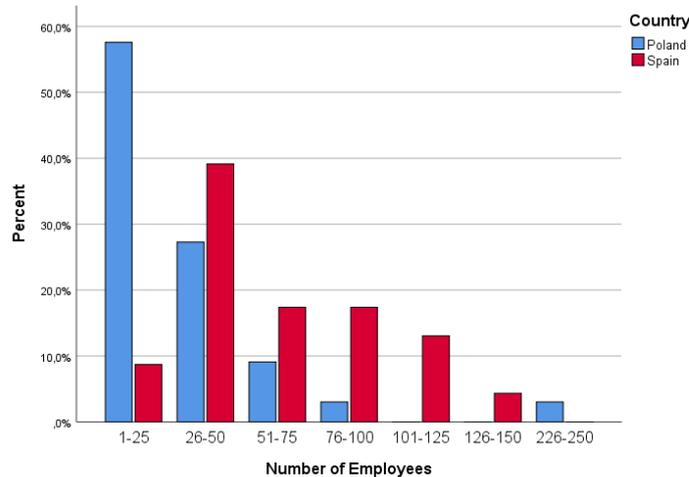


Fig. 1. Number of employees in schools of participants

The next question asked the participants if they had ever seen an ePortfolio before participating in the survey. The majority of respondents had not had previous contact with the ePortfolio, though the Polish educators (67%) were somewhat less familiar with the ePortfolio than their Spanish counterparts (57%). Figure 2 displays the breakdown of the responses.

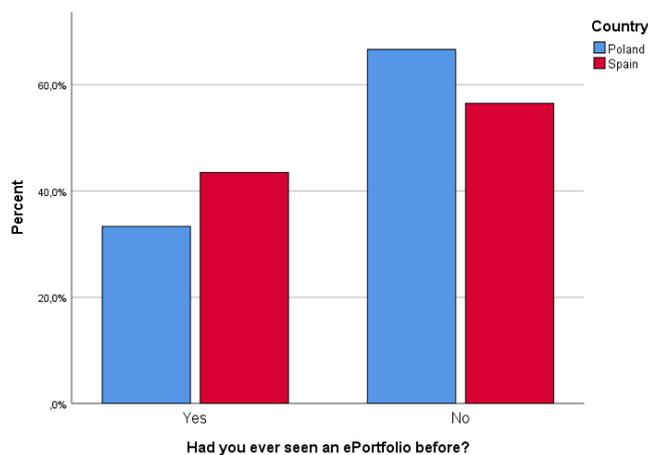


Fig. 2. Previous contact with ePortfolio

The next item asked respondents about their willingness to use an ePortfolio to select a successful job candidate. Eighty-six percent of all respondents agreed to some degree (including those who somewhat and strongly agreed) that they would use an ePortfolio to choose a job candidate. There were no statistically significant differences between responses based on either country or previous contact with the ePortfolio.

The following item asked if the school principals would be willing to make the effort to review the ePortfolios of all the candidates. It is interesting to note that 35% of the Spanish principals disagreed to some extent with reviewing all of the candidates' portfolios, while only 18% of the Polish directors expressed the same lack of agreement. These responses were not significantly influenced by previous contact (or lack thereof) with ePortfolio. See Figure 3.

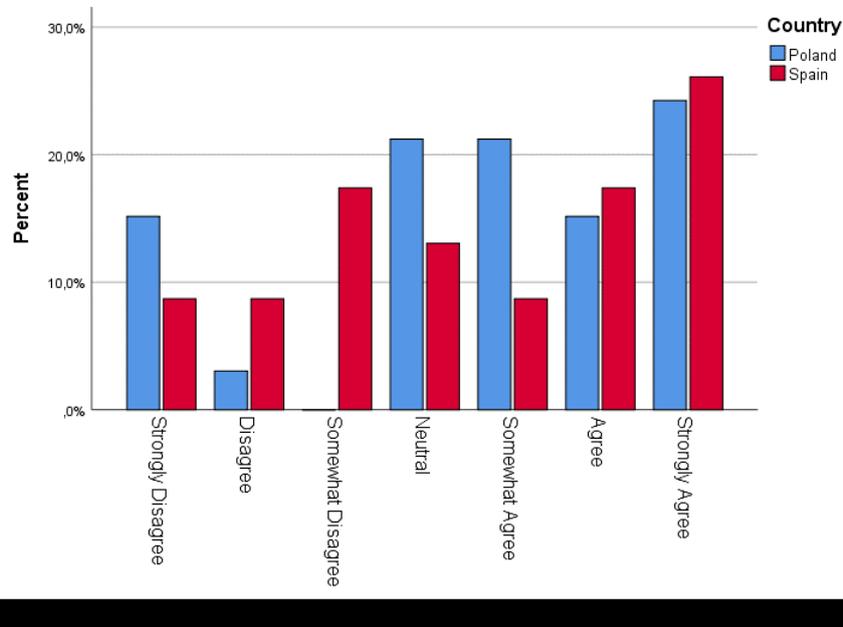


Fig. 3. Willingness to review the ePortfolios of all candidates

Though reviewing ePortfolios of job candidates is considered by some to be time consuming [14][31][33][34], our data revealed that the directors of the two schools with the most employees (one from Spain and the other from Poland) either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with reviewing the ePortfolios of all candidates.

Next the respondents were asked to rate their agreement with reviewing the ePortfolios of only the top three candidates. As can be seen in Figure 4, the responses are heavily skewed to the right, showing a very clear willingness to review the ePortfolio of the three best candidates for a position.

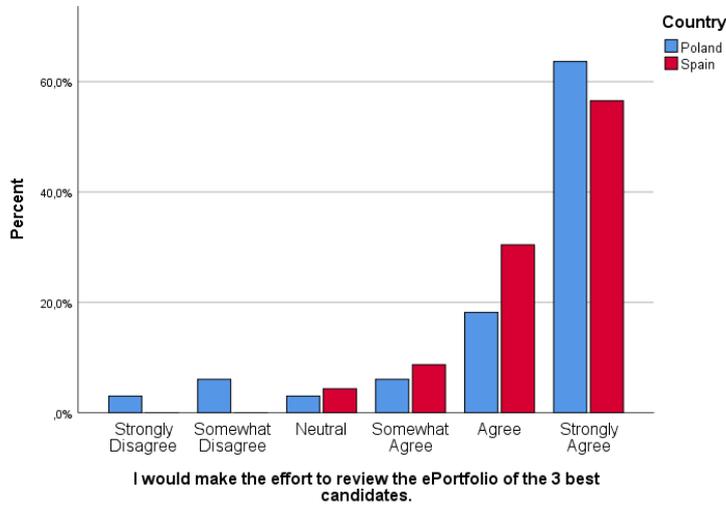


Fig. 4. Willingness to review ePortfolios of the three best candidates.

When the data are reviewed by school size, the results are also clear. Respondents from almost every size school would be willing to analyze at the ePortfolios of the top three contenders. See Figure 5.

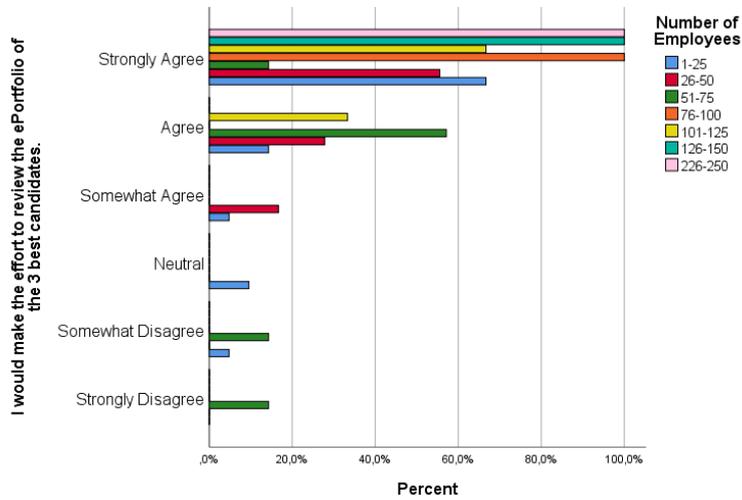


Fig. 5. Willingness to review ePortfolios of the three best candidates by number of employees

The item that followed asked respondents if they would make the effort to review the ePortfolio of only the top candidate. Once again, school principals clearly answered in the affirmative, as respondents from both countries (67% Poland and 78% Spain) agreed, somewhat agreed or strongly agreed they would make the effort to examine the ePortfolio of the best candidate.

The last item on the questionnaire asked the principals to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the statement, “The ePortfolio seems like a useful tool to obtain more, and more detailed information about candidates for a position.” There was only one respondent that disagreed with this statement, while 43% percent of all respondents strongly agreed. See Figure 6. Neither previous contact with the ePortfolio nor the number of employees significantly affected the distribution of responses.

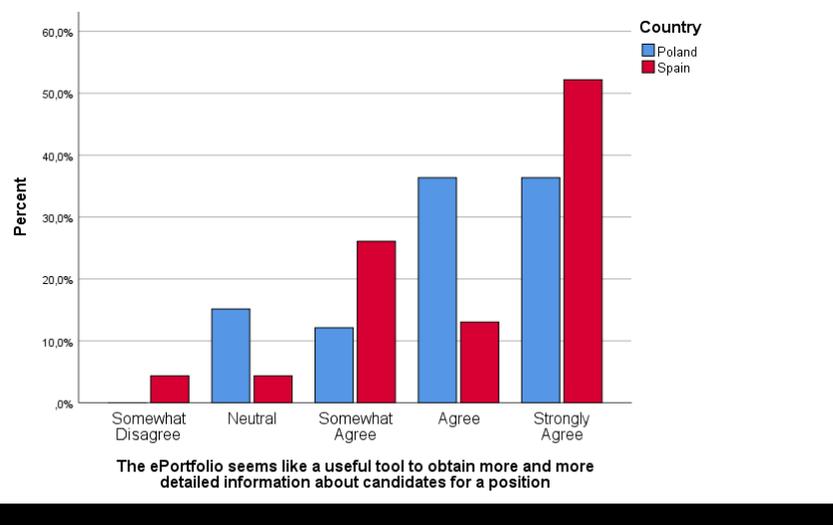


Fig. 6. The ePortfolio seems like a useful tool to obtain more, and more detailed information about candidates for a position

4 Discussion and Conclusions

In this research, school principals from Poland and Spain, from schools of varied sizes, with and without previous contact with ePortfolios, indicated a willingness to use the ePortfolio as a hiring tool. These findings coincide with the previously published research [14][29][31][34][37][39].

It was evident that there was less exposure to the ePortfolio among those respondents from Poland. However, respondents from both countries that had no previous contact with ePortfolio seem to have been sufficiently impressed by the examples of the career ePortfolios given at the beginning of the survey to

recognize the value of the ePortfolio as a tool for hiring qualified applicants. The fact that these professional educators could appreciate this, even with only a very brief contact with example ePortfolios, is telling, especially when considering that the positive appraisals were unaffected by country, school size, or previous contact. This is coherent with the findings published in Ref. [2].

It was interesting to note that 62.5% of all respondents (67% of Polish participants, and 57% of Spanish participants) had not had previous contact with the ePortfolio, neither educational nor career versions. Certainly, these participants, in particular, could benefit from learning the best practices related to using the ePortfolio as a recruitment tool so they can leverage all of the benefits it has to offer. Previous research has pointed out the need for those responsible for the selection and hiring process to be informed and trained in the use and benefits of the ePortfolio in order to capitalize on the unique benefits that it has to offer [34][14]. Perhaps there could be a residual benefit of providing ePortfolio training to school principals, who may be responsible for hiring faculty and staff at their institution, but are also professional educators, as this could be a catalyst for implementing a student ePortfolio program as well.

Future research might include a qualitative and quantitative study on the effectiveness of ePortfolios as a hiring tool conducted among school principals and job applicants. It would also be valuable to analyze in what format and stage of the hiring process the school principals would consult candidates' ePortfolios.

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6 Authors

Monika Ciesielkiewicz, Ph.D., Associate Professor, School of Education, Department of Applied Didactics; Villanueva Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. Address: Villanueva-Universidad Complutense Madrid. Costa Brava 2, 28034. Madrid, Spain. Email: mciesielkiewicz@villanueva.edu

Claire Frances Bonilla, MSc in Education and New Technologies, Contributor Researcher, Department of Computer Science, UDIMA – Universidad a Distancia de Madrid. Madrid, Spain. Email: clairefbonilla@gmail.com

Carlos Olave López de Ayala, Global Head of HR at LG Electronics, LG Twin Towers, 128 Yeoui-daero, Yeongdeungpo-gu, Seoul, 07336 Korea. Email: carlos.olave@lge.com

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