

## ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS WITH E-PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT IN TOURISM INTERNSHIPS

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### Abstract:

*The emergence of the digital economy has impacted the employability skills required in the hospitality and tourism industry. The lack of employability skills among tourism students poses a significant challenge in developing their careers in the industry. In today's digitally focused landscape of the industry, technological advancements need to be adapted in assessing learning activities including internships for tourism students. This paper is an early-stage study on the notion of employability skills, the concept of e-portfolio evaluations in education, and the need to improve employability skills in tourism internship assessment using an e-portfolio. E-portfolio-based assessments reflect on interns' target strengths and limitations, encouraging self-awareness and self-directed learning as interns have opportunities to record the progress of internship work and experiences. In summary, this paper concludes and recommends that to prepare the future skilled tourism workforce, tourism educators can use the e-portfolio to assess the students' internship work that will further enhance their employability skills.*

**Keywords:** employability skills; e-portfolio; higher education; tourism internship; tourism education

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### 1.0 Introduction

Employability skills are crucial for achieving success in the tourist sector, and there is an increasing acknowledgment of their significance among educators, employers, and students. (Wesley et al., 2017). However, employers frequently observe deficiencies in skills among potential hires or existing employees, indicating a requirement for a more thorough comprehension of the skills shortage. (Hurrell, 2015). In fact, one of the unemployment problems identified among young graduates is caused by their lack of employability skills (Puad, 2018). Many tourism students are in the early stages of their careers, which may cause limited exposure to real-world work situations. As a result, they may lack the practical experience necessary to develop and exhibit soft skills. The requisite employability skills for tourism students encompass a wide range of abilities, including organizational, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills that are applicable in numerous career scenarios within the tourism industry (Hinton et al., 2017).

However, Teng et al. (2019) in their study have identified a noticeable deficiency in these skills among tourism students in Malaysia. The matter has garnered considerable attention within the nation, particularly about higher education. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of redirecting the emphasis in tourism education from traditional operational aspects to the cultivation of technology awareness, knowledge, and the development of soft skills (Daniels et al., 2022; Joshi & Gupta, 2021). Based on this issue, it shows that the sector has experienced significant transformations, necessitating students to be ready to adjust to these changes and meet the industry's growing requirements. The scenario provides a clear indication that there is a pressing concern regarding the future risk of young individuals in tourism employment without the necessary skills demanded by the industry.

In relation to the above notion, internships offer students the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in the industry, such as interpersonal communication, leadership, teamwork, and creativity which are widely

acknowledged as key elements for employability in the sector (Hinton et al., 2017; Sisson & Adams, 2013). Internships are crucial in the field of tourism since they offer students important hands-on experience and enhance their prospects of securing employment. Based on a survey performed in Australia and Hong Kong, students consistently ranked internships as more valuable than specialized courses when it comes to securing their initial employment in the hotel and tourism industry (Lam & Ching, 2007). Besides, a study conducted by Seraphin et al. (2021) claimed that by applying the Triple Helix Model, which emphasizes collaboration between academia, industry, and government, can help facilitate more internship opportunities and practical training in tourism education. The strategic collaboration between these partners can be seen as the most significant factor in ensuring the graduates' employability skills are measured and developed through various quality learning activities, especially during practical training.

In light of the aforementioned scenario, the evaluation of the internship program for students studying tourism becomes a matter of importance to ensure the successful acquisition of such skills by the students. The use of physical or printed portfolios for evaluating performance in tourism internships has been the subject of ongoing discussion in recent years. Researchers contend that printed portfolios have become obsolete in the digital era. According to Hall and Page (2014), the tourism sector undergoes continuous changes, with digital and technical innovations playing a crucial role in influencing its daily operations and business practices, thus impacting the tourism curriculum to take essential actions for improvement. Buhalis and Costa (2006) highlight the significance and advantages of utilizing digital tools and platforms in tourism management courses for teaching and evaluating students' learning results. These literature sources suggest that printed portfolios may no longer be relevant in the field of tourism education.

Alternatively, e-portfolios have been acknowledged as a significant instrument for evaluation in many educational settings, specifically in augmenting students' employability proficiencies. An electronic portfolio is a highly efficient approach for students to demonstrate the learning paths or abilities they acquire by actively pursuing certain objectives or competencies in various academic areas (Andriotis, 2017). In addition, e-portfolios have the qualities of flexibility and adaptability, allowing for easy updates and integration into professional networking platforms. This makes them valuable as a tool for job searching or self-promotion (Mobarhan & Rahman, 2014). It was supported in the study conducted by Hinton et al. (2017) which demonstrates that students concur that e-portfolios are beneficial for organization, can be utilized in assignments, and useful for job search activities. This is an advantage of utilizing e-portfolios where employers may assess the abilities, expertise, and accomplishments of potential tourist employees that align with their companies' objectives.

## **2.0 Methodology**

The progress or advancement of the conceptual paper commenced by examining relevant literature, thereafter, establishing connections between the utilization of portfolios and the enhancement of employability skills in the field of tourist education. During the analytical phase, pertinent articles were acquired from search engines such as Taylor & Francis, Science Direct, Sage Publications, and Emerald Publishing. The text utilized various key terms, including 'e-portfolio as assessment in tourism internship', 'benefit of e-portfolio as learning tools', and 'the usage of e-portfolios to enhance employability skills'. Out of the initial pool of 96 articles, only 29 were retained after the screening process. These 29 articles were then supplemented with relevant government and industry reports. Out of all the articles selected, 48% were focused on the use of e-portfolio as an assessment, while the remaining articles were about the broader use of e-portfolios.

## **3.0 Literature Review**

### **E-Portfolio as a Tool for Assessment in Higher Education**

E-portfolio assessment has gained attention in various fields of education (Makokotlela, 2020). It has been found that e-portfolios allow students to monitor and assess their knowledge and understanding continuously and consistently (Kabilan, 2016). For instance, Bekri (2015) conducted research that identified indicators for the utilization of e-portfolios as a tool in virtual learning for the Malaysian Skills Certification (MSC), a TVET program in Malaysia. The study identified four key elements for the use of e-portfolios: exhibition, learning management, assessment, and personal space with a total of 22 indicators were identified to assess the competency

of MSC students. Hence, it is important for tourism institutions and academia to identify the suitable elements and indicators of e-portfolio (Bekri, 2015) to achieve learning outcomes, particularly tourism internships.

Besides, students have a positive outlook on using e-portfolios for learning assessment, as they believe that e-portfolios enhance enthusiasm and involvement in the learning process (Muin et al., 2021). Moreover, Hinton et al. (2017) reported that the majority of higher education students in Durham College agreed that the use of e-portfolio helped them learned about and self-assess their employability skills. Yastibas and Yastibas (2015) identified ten distinct characteristics of e-portfolios. In their examination of the literature, they ascribed implementing an e-portfolio system to characteristics such as being authentic, controlled, communicative, dynamic, personalized, integrative, multi-purposed, multi-sourced, motivational, and reflective. E-portfolios have also been employed in higher education settings, such as Sookmyung Women's University in South Korea, where they are used for learning reflection, professional development, and assessment (Syzykova et al., 2021). Undoubtedly, e-portfolio has numerous advantages when employed as an assessment tool in higher education. Further, this study provides a concise overview of the existing literature on the utilization of e-portfolios as instruments for evaluating students' learning in different settings.

**Table 1: E-portfolio as assessment tools in higher education**

<b>Authors and study context</b>	<b>Type of learners</b>	<b>E-portfolio required components</b>	<b>Types of assessments or skills</b>
Wali et al. (2018) - Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Malaysia	Educational Management and Leadership, Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Visual Arts study fields in the Faculty of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• user profile</li> <li>• article writing</li> <li>• skills-reflection</li> <li>• self-reflection</li> <li>• project progress</li> </ul>	Formative assessment – communication, teamwork, problem solving
Ghalib et al. (2014) - International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), Malaysia	Arabic language students, Department of Arabic Language and Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• user profile</li> <li>• journal</li> <li>• artifacts</li> <li>• networking</li> <li>• language tools</li> </ul>	Formative assessment and a self-advertisement tool
Namaziandost et al. (2020) - English Language Institutes in Ahvaz, Iran	English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• written compositions                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guided writings</li> <li>• diaries</li> </ul> </li> <li>• letters to friends</li> <li>• story writing and reflection papers</li> <li>• transcripts of video or audio reports</li> </ul>	Communication, organizational skills
Sarwandi et al. (2022) - Indonesian Aviation Polytechnic Curug, Indonesia	Cadets of the Aircraft Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• submission of assignments</li> <li>• assessment material for lecturers and educational institution</li> <li>• class discussions</li> </ul>	Critical thinking, problem-solving skills

Table 1 summarizes several literatures about using e-portfolios as assessment tools in various education settings. Different types of learners, various teaching and learning features, and employability skills competency assessments have utilized them. This evidently shows that using e-portfolios as tools in conducting assessments in higher education helps achieve the intention of enhancing those skills.

### **E-Portfolio as an Alternative Assessment in Tourism Internship**

In hospitality and tourism, integrating authentic assessment tasks in work-integrated learning (WIL) in internships is important (Nyanjom et al., 2020). This method entails integrating practical assignments and projects into the internship experience, which can be recorded and displayed in electronic portfolios. E-portfolios provide a flexible teaching instrument that enables students to evaluate their academic achievements, get constructive criticism, and fulfill projects to demonstrate their abilities to prospective employers (Baturay & Daloğlu, 2010). Research conducted by Hinton et al. (2017) found that students who have utilized e-portfolios reported significant improvements in their interpersonal abilities, communication skills, and personal skills. The implementation of this comprehensive approach is expected to yield advantages for both the supply and demand sides of the tourism labor market. The educational institution is equipping its students with the necessary skills and qualifications to be readily employable, while companies are finding it effortless to locate suitable candidates.

Since tourism is highly emphasized in developing functional skills for graduates, it is believed that e-portfolios can be a suitable tool for teaching and learning activities, including assessment. This digital-based tool's flexible feature allows learners and educators to conduct and organize the knowledge-acquiring process creatively. Tourism students undertaking internships can use the e-portfolio to record their daily routines, describe their tasks given by employers, create e-resumes, creatively show skills development, and self-reflect on what has been learned and experienced throughout the internships. Ghalib et al. (2014) claimed that a functional e-portfolio is crucial for the teaching and learning processes, serving as a formative evaluation tool from the start of the academic semester, thus providing an extra layer of learning for students.

Today, many higher education institutions in Malaysia apply a diverse set of technological tools and resources to store, create, and share information. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) outlines ten (10) Shifts, and one of those is 'Globalized Online Learning' that contributes to good quality content, enhances the quality of teaching and learning, lowers the cost of delivery, and bring Malaysian expertise to the global community. In line with this aspiration, tourism education should take advantage of the robust cyberinfrastructure to adopt technology-driven innovations in conducting internship assessments. This will contribute to the objective of equipping students with crucial employability skills, enabling them to become highly skilled professionals in the tourism industry.

### **4.0 Conclusion**

In conjunction with the benefits of using e-portfolios, it can be a helpful assessment tool in improving the employability skills of tourism students when they undergo internships. Self-reflection, interpersonal skills, communication skills, digital skills, and organizational skills can be enhanced using e-portfolio assessment. Students who participate in e-portfolio-based assessments can reflect on their target strengths and limitations, encouraging self-awareness and self-directed learning as they have opportunities to record the progress of internship work and experiences. Therefore, an e-portfolio has the potential to provide students with a dynamic tool for reflecting on their learning, receiving feedback, and showcasing their talents and achievements to potential employers. E-portfolios can thoroughly and authentically assess students' knowledge, abilities, and competencies during tourism internships. There will likely be future research conducted to investigate how e-portfolios might be utilized for the purpose of developing important skills, assessing them, and enhancing tourism employability.

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