

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### ***Digital Resilience of ePortfolios During and Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons for the Future***

EDITED BY MPHOTO-ENTLE PULENG MODISE AND NORMAN VAUGHAN

**Open Education Alberta**

<https://pressbooks.openeducationalberta.ca/digital-resilience-eportfolios/>

#### **Introduction**

The Covid-19 pandemic created a major imperative to adapt teaching, learning, and assessment practices, forcing education systems to resort to emergency remote teaching to ensure continuity. In *Digital resilience of eportfolios during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Lessons for the future*, Mpho-Entle Puleng Modise and Norman Vaughan bring together a comprehensive collection of scholarly articles that examine how ePortfolios were used during and beyond this period of disruption.

The volume is very broad in scope, with 43 chapters by 85 authors, grouped into seven themes: building digital resilience, navigating challenges, rethinking assessment, design for impact, empowering educators, lifelong learning, and future directions for digital resilience in education.

The editors present the book as one that not only focuses on emergency responses during the pandemic but also reflects on how ePortfolios can be productive in both educational and professional contexts, building resilience and supporting future innovative models of learning and assessment. This objective is evident in the book's introduction. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of ePortfolios during a period of high disruption in contemporary educational history, while also highlighting their pertinence to student support, professional development, and lifelong learning.

ePortfolio systems are basically technological solutions to a traditional paper-based approach. But portfolios, in themselves, are a useful pedagogical tool for teaching and learning. They are pertinent, for example, in assessing skills and competencies. This broader perspective on student assessment and evaluation aligns with current global debates and the rising influence of micro-credentials in education.

An important element of the book is that the chapters provide a broad contextual coverage from a geographical perspective. There is a strong presence of African experiences, which is a crucial aspect, especially from the perspective of access and the digital divide. It shows that the conversation about digital transformation, authentic assessment, and resilience is not limited to those with technologically mature systems.

#### **Critical Analysis**

As already mentioned, a major strength of this book is its breadth of scope and depth in the applications of ePortfolios and their potential in education and practice. The seven thematic sections help the reader see ePortfolios from multiple angles:



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- as tools for resilience,
- as alternatives for assessment,
- as supports for teacher education, and
- as spaces that are now being reshaped by Artificial Intelligence (AI) and learning analytics.

The broad scope is critical to avoid viewing ePortfolios through a narrow technical lens. As a reader, an education practitioner, and a reformer of education systems (in particular, assessment models), I was particularly interested in the assessment and evaluation sections of the book. In Chapter 11, the author critiques higher education assessment practices as often being “stagnated, rigid and static” (p. 199) rather than evolutionary, and presents ePortfolios as a more authentic and transformative approach. While ePortfolios are not the only alternative, the author(s) do make a strong and valid statement which I subscribe to. Similarly, another chapter evokes the concept of ePortfolios as “dynamic, reflective and living documents” (p. 199) rather than storage spaces. They are seen as tools to support lifelong learning, critical thinking and continuous professional development. These are the fundamental pieces of a conversation signalling a clear attempt to shift from narrow testing approaches (e.g., supervised, closed-book examinations) towards a deeper understanding of the learning process and the assessment, not of the learner *per se*, but of the extent to which the learning has taken place.

In fact, several chapters in the book highlight that the pandemic paved the way and brought practitioners towards a convergence of opinions calling for a rethinking and a reform of educational assessment models. Across the chapters, an interesting observation is that the makeshift arrangements during the pandemic did not necessarily result in weaker or less reliable assessments. However, the emergency nature of the process remained its most significant pedagogical limitation as alternative assessments were adopted out of necessity rather than designed with deliberate learning intent.

Digital and emerging technologies, such as virtual reality, AI, and blockchain, are currently shaping the current educational landscape. A concept that gained significant momentum during the Covid-19 era, supported by digital technologies, was micro-learning that leads to micro-certifications (micro-credentials). At the heart of micro-credentials is the element of competencies. What particularly caught my attention in this book was the arguments put forward in the different chapters about the value of ePortfolios in demonstrating the acquisition and application of competencies in authentic contexts. ePortfolios are presented here as spaces where learners can demonstrate what they can do, apply, reflect on, and become over time, which is often much harder to capture through conventional examinations alone.

The major criticism of alternative modes of assessment, such as ePortfolios, is how to ensure reliability and integrity, especially in the age of the internet and AI, where plagiarism and academic dishonesty, including the unethical use of AI, are a cause for concern in academia. Chapter 39 on AI and ePortfolios is useful here because it explicitly states that “validity and reliability of portfolios are important” (p. 656) and warns that uncritical and unethical student use of AI might compromise both. This is a very important caution. It reminds the reader that while ePortfolios could open up richer forms of assessment, institutions still need to think carefully about trustworthiness, academic integrity, moderation, and consistency if such approaches are to be scaled responsibly.

During the pandemic, although emergency remote teaching via online platforms was adopted in many institutions, research shows that the digital divide often widened educational

disparities. In the book, Chapter 8 on rural schools is especially valuable because it identifies the practical obstacles that shape whether ePortfolios can be used meaningfully at all. It highlights “the digital divide among learners” (p. 160) as one of the major challenges and links this to infrastructure, digital access, professional development, and technical support. The Eswatini case study in Chapter 15 points to the need to “bridge the digital divide” (p. 264) through improved connectivity, low-bandwidth platforms, device support, and better usability design. The conversation on the digital divide is one of the most important elements of the book from a learning-for-development perspective, as it reminds us that digital transformation is not only about tools and technological maturity, but also about the conditions for equitable participation.

That said, the volume is less explicit on student completion and performance in a direct empirical sense. It speaks clearly to participation, access, digital inequality, and inclusion, but the relationship between ePortfolios and student achievement remains less fully developed. For readers interested in retention and successful completion in disadvantaged contexts, this is an area where the book could have gone further.

### Concluding Note

Overall, the book is a timely and valuable contribution. Beyond documenting the use of ePortfolios during a period of crisis, it shows that disruption helped reopen important questions about assessment, competencies, and digital equity. While the volume could have gone further on student achievement and completion, it still makes a strong case for ePortfolios as part of a more authentic, reflective, and inclusive approach to learning and assessment.

### Reviewer Notes

**Mohammad Issack Santally** is Professor and Officer-in-Charge of the Centre for Innovative and Lifelong Learning at the University of Mauritius. He is the UNESCO Chair in Inclusive Educational Technologies and Commonwealth of Learning Chair. His work focuses on educational technology, open and distance learning, teacher education, digital transformation, micro-credentials, and innovation in higher education. Email: [m.santally@uom.ac.mu](mailto:m.santally@uom.ac.mu) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3745-2150>)

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