Enhancing ELT through self-assessment

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Abstract

This qualitative study was an attempt to enhance English language teaching and learning through the employment of some self-assessment techniques. Towards this end, the writers reviewed the various definitions of the term *self-assessment*, its pedagogical benefits and the studies conducted to investigate its effect on other ELT variables such as language skills, linguistic competence, self-efficacy, and learner autonomy. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that self-assessment could enhance ELT. In order to verify this hypothesis, seven classroom assessment techniques, which required the employment of self-assessment were adopted while teaching an ELT methods course to 48 students of English at Sultan Qaboos University. In order to measure the effectiveness of these techniques, the students' product while carrying out the tasks in the course was analyzed. In addition, two other evaluation techniques were applied (the chain-notes and the teacher-designed format). It was found that self-assessment helped enhance teaching and learning through raising the extent of involvement and participation in the classroom, and that the students perceived it as useful and interesting. However, in this study an important variable was not investigated; the effect of self-assessment on the achievement of EFL students. This might be the target of an experimental, further study.

Keywords: *classroom assessment techniques (CATs); self-assessment; metacognitive strategy; alternative assessment; enhancing ELT*

The term self-assessment has been defined and assigned many pedagogical benefits by a large number of ELT specialists, e.g. Richards and Schmidt (1985), Dickinson (1987), El Jawhari (1988), Oscarson (1989), Butler & Winne (1995), Harris (1997), Black & William (1998), Gardner (1999), Carr (2002), Toppings (2003), Harlen & Winter (2004), Harvey (2004), Purtić and Sad (2006), Aeginitou et al (2007), Carless (2007), Finch 2008, and Tan (2008).

In their *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Richards and Schmidt (1985:475), for example, define self-assessment (or self-evaluation) as "checking one's own performance on a language learning task after it has been completed or checking one's own success in using a language… [It] is an example of a metacognitive strategy in language learning". Dickinson (1987) considers learning how to assess oneself as an important educational objective because: (1) it develops autonomy, (2) it leads towards evaluation which is important in its own right, (3) it is a kind of training which is beneficial to

learning, (4) it is a necessary part of self-determination, and (5) it is one way of alleviating the assessment burden on the teacher. El Jawhari (1988) defines self-assessment in language learning as the ability to test and evaluate one's own performance and see how effective the procedure is, then decide whether to go on to the next task or exercise or not while practicing the four language skills. Oscarson (1989, as cited by Finch, 2008) provides a strong rationale of self-assessment procedures in language learning. This includes: (1) promotion of learning, (2) raised level of awareness, (3) improved goal orientation, (4) expansion of range of assessment, (5) shared assessment burden, and (6) beneficial post-course effects. Butler & Winne (1995) claim that self-assessment is *a key to learning* (added emphasis).

In the light of the definitions above and according to Richards and Schmidt (1985, p. 23), self-assessment is considered a type of alternative assessment which incorporates "various types of assessment procedures that are seen as alternatives or complements to traditional standardized testing…Procedures used in alternative assessment include self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolios, learner diaries or journals, student–teacher conferences, interviews, and observation". Accordingly, self assessment is considered an important type of alternative assessment. It can be argued that it is the most important type because it is connected with the reflective approach commonly adopted in training and professional development of individuals. In addition, as will be shown in the empirical studies reviewed below, it has positive effects on many pedagogical variables such as achievement, learner autonomy, self-efficacy, motivation, etc.

Holec (1987, as cited in Gardner, 1999) makes a connection between self-assessment and autonomy, defining autonomy as the ability to take charge of one's learning. Based on this definition, self-assessment has become a tool which supports those with that ability. Autonomous learners decide what to learn, when to learn and how to learn. Self assessors decide what to assess, when to assess it and how to assess it. Autonomous learners take responsibility for their learning and this includes taking responsibility for monitoring their progress. Harris (1997, p. 15) considers self-assessment as a practical tool for making students more active, assisting them to learn how to communicate in another language, activating autonomous language learning, and enabling them to   perceive and monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs. Students, he argued, are often passive in their approach to learning, and may become demotivated if they cannot see any clear progress. Self-assessment produces learners who are more motivated, active, focused, and better placed to assess their own progress and it, to use Harris' exact words, "encourages the student to become part of the whole process of language learning and to be aware of individual progress". Black & William (1998) indicate that self-assessment is not an interesting option or luxury, it is essential for learning. Topping (2003) argues that self-assessment is an active participation in learners' learning and is a continuous longitudinal process.

In line with Dickinson (1987), Holec (1987) and Harris (1997), Harvey (2004) defines self-assessment as a process of self-reflection in which the quality of one's own performance is critically reviewed. However, he expands it to incorporate not only the individual, but also the institution or sub-institutional unit being reviewed and the preparation of a report document which reflects that assessment. In a case as such, self-assessment is used interchangeably with self-evaluation and self-study in the context of higher education.

Another simple definition of self-assessment is given by Purtić and Sad (2006) in the form of four questions: *Where am I and what do I know? Where do I want to go? How can I get there? What else do I need to know*? They argue that if we think of learning as a never-ending process, then our students should be aware of that by involving them, making them

more responsible for the results of their work, and motivating them. This can be done, if students practice self-assessment and make it a habit.

Aeginitou et al (2007) sum up the benefits of self-assessment in six points. These are: (1) monitoring of learning and progress, (2) setting goals for the future, (3) encouraging responsibility for learning, (4) promoting critical thinking, (5) constructing and reconstructing knowledge, and (6) bridging the gap between high and low achievers. Very recently, Tan (2008) considers self-assessment as a practice and as a goal in higher education and argues that it has the potential to enhance and further students' lifelong learning.

In a presentation given at Hong Kong University, Carless (2007, citing Butler & Winne, 1995 and Black & William, 1998) defines self-assessment and sums up its benefits in the following points:

1. It is not about awarding grades to oneself.
2. It is not an interesting option or luxury, it is essential for learning, and helps students to learn better.
3. It involves thinking about work in relation to standards or criteria.
4. It identifies strengths and weaknesses and how to improve.
5. It incorporates metacognition: monitoring student's progress as they learn, and adapting their learning strategies.
6. It is essential to doing well in summative assessments and enhancing learning (formative).
7. It has potential to make students less dependent on the teacher and more prepared for lifelong learning.

In addition to the benefits above, Gardner (1999) lists some other benefits of self-assessment. These are:

1. *Individualization:* Self assessment helps learners monitor their individualized progress by knowing how they are doing in their learning.
2. *Reflection:* Self-assessment helps learners to reflect upon their learning strategies and learning materials.
3. *Motivation:* Self-assessment can have a motivational effect especially when it demonstrates success which breeds confidence and enhances learners' motivation.
4. *Evaluation*: Self-assessment can contribute to formal assessment requirements. However, there is still a long road ahead to use self-assessment formally in the classroom.
5. *Monitoring:* Self-assessment helps learners monitor their language proficiency and level of success while conducting tasks.
6. *Support*: Through self-assessment, learners can identify specific areas where they need support and help from teachers.
7. *Accreditation*: Self-assessment (or what is called self-study when used in that sense) is a tool towards accreditation, which can be of benefit to institutions. It provides the evidence for the appropriate use of resources, e.g. funds, equipment and teachers' time.

Studies on Self-assessment

In this section some studies from the related literature are reviewed in order to throw light on the empirical effectiveness of self-assessment. These studies include Black & William (1998), Gardner (1999), Wei and Chen (2004), Coronado-Aliegro (2006), Zavistanavičienė et al (2006), Kavaliauskienė (2007), and Martin (2008).

Black & William (1998) attempted to have a link between self- and peer-assessment, and formative assessment. The attempt achieved some success with pupils from age 5 upward. The researchers argued that the link of self-assessment to formative assessment is inevitable and that the main problem of self-assessment is not a problem of reliability and trustworthiness, but the lack of a sufficiently clear picture of the targets. Adopting peer-and self-assessment, further promotes reflection, which is essential to good learning. The researchers concluded that to maximize the effectiveness of formative assessment, pupils should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main targets of their learning and how to achieve them.

Gardner (1999) conducted a workshop whose goals were to look at the benefits and problems of self-assessment for learners, identify the ways in which teachers can help learners understand and implement self-assessment, and produce one or more templates for self-assessment which participants could take away with them. These goals were achieved because of the ideas and enthusiasm of the participants. Wei and Chen (2004) conducted a study in which they described how Chinese learners of English at the intermediate level were supported and guided to effectively assess their own compositions. The researchers used four support techniques which were: Class checklists, teacher assessment, peer assessment, and writing knowledge. The results indicated that the use of these support techniques encouraged students to look critically and analytically at their writing, cost the teachers less reviewing time and allowed students a sense of safety and certainty, which was most desirable for Chinese EFL learners.

Coronado-Aliegro (2006) attempted to investigate the influence of a continuous self-assessment component on the self-efficacy of undergraduate students studying Spanish as a foreign language. The subjects of the study were 104 students from two different universities (62 in the treatment group and 42 in the control group). The Spanish as a Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (SFL-SEQ) was completed by the participants during the second week of the semester (pre-test) and during the final week (post-test). In the treatment group, the subjects also completed weekly self-assessment questionnaires. The results showed that self-efficacy scores of the treatment group increased significantly, whereas it did not for the control group. It was concluded that the Spanish undergraduate students' self-efficacy seemed to be heightened significantly more with continuous self-assessment than without it.

Zavistanaviciene et al (2006) adopted self-assessment as an alternative method at the Centre of Foreign Languages, Kaunas University of Technology (KTU). Results indicated that the achievements to improve language skills should be initiated from students themselves, and that self-assessment in foreign language learning is rewarding, meaningful and affective when perceived individually. The researchers concluded that self-assessment is a practical tool in the university classroom.

In an ESP context at a university in Lithuania, Kavaliauskiene (2007) conducted a survey on the usefulness of different assignments and learners' written reflections. Learners' assignments included various contributions to portfolios such as essays, summaries of professional texts, outlines of oral presentations, creative computer tasks, tests as well as students' written self-assessment notes, i.e. their reflections on various classroom activities. The results demonstrated that self-assessment was beneficial for learners' linguistic development. The learners' reflections revealed their perceptions towards the usefulness of various assignments in learning. The study concluded that reflective practice might help teachers improve the quality of teaching and that training learners to reflect on learning outcomes is beneficial from the perspective of lifelong learning.

In another study, Martin (2008) argued that one challenge facing teachers in many language classrooms was helping students move from a traditional testing culture to self-assessment culture. He hypothesized that self-assessment could enhance students' development of language skills and provide them confidence and learning ownership. His study tool was the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment" (CEF). The participants of the study were students in university English classes in Taiwan. Martin gave them the tool to help them plan their learning, develop self-assessment and encourage learner autonomy. The results of the study showed that the students had mixed reactions to using the CEF checklist. Those students who favored it felt that it was a good tool to help them examine their learning process and goals, whereas those who were less enthusiastic about using the CEF checklist felt that it was something that they should do, but that it was difficult to implement. It was concluded that the students could be aware of the value of self-assessment and its role in the learning process, if their teachers supported and provided them with the right self-assessment tool.

So far, we have reviewed eight studies adopting self-assessment as an independent variable with the purpose of measuring its effect on other dependent variables such as formative assessment, evaluation of students' written work, problems and solutions of adopting self-assessment, self-efficacy, motivation, learner autonomy, linguistic development, development of language skills, and confidence. In all these studies, it was concluded that self-assessment had significantly positive effects on the dependant variables, and hence on improving the teaching/learning process.

Context of the problem

The students in the English major at the College of Education (Sultan Qaboos University) study a four-credit hour course on methods of teaching English, along with the other pedagogical courses. The course is divided into a two-hour theoretical part called ELT Methods 2, and another two-hour practical part called ELT Microteaching. The theoretical part includes topics such as teaching structures, teaching writing, teaching speaking, teaching English to young learners, etc. While teaching this theoretical part, it was observed that the students were often passive and did not have the desire to be involved in the class. They were not used to participation or discussion because lecturing was the dominating mode of instruction in many of the courses. Accordingly, it was hypothesized that teaching and learning of this course could be enhanced through the injection of some self-assessment techniques.

Method

Research design and subjects

This study is a qualitative study which was applied to 48 students of English attending the ELT Methods 2 Course at the College of Education, Sultan Qaboos University. Thus, the students constituted an intact sample.

Tools of the study

In order to employ self-assessment in the classroom, we developed and adapted some tools or techniques for helping students practice self-assessment. Thus, nine self-assessment techniques were adapted from Angelo and Cross (1993). These techniques include:

1. Goal Matching and Ranking
2. Last Minute Paper
3. Application Cards
4. One-Sentence Summary
5. Teacher-Designed Feedback Form
6. Project Prospectus
7. Directed Paraphrasing
8. Muddiest Point
9. Chain-Notes Technique

The nine techniques above are referred to as classroom assessment techniques (henceforth CATs). These CATs are chosen because while carrying out them, students are required to employ self-assessment. In the current study, the first seven techniques are called Self-Assessment CATs. They are used for enhancing teaching and learning the various topics of the course, whereas the eighth and ninth techniques are called Evaluation CATs. They are used at the end of the course for evaluating the effectiveness of the other self-assessment CATs. Both the Self-Assessment CATs and the Evaluation CATs are described in detail in the treatment section below.

Treatment, analysis and discussion

The treatment in this investigation incorporates teaching the various parts of the course using the lecture technique with the injection of the seven self-assessment CATs mentioned above. In this section, the CATs are described, and the data obtained from applying them are analyzed and discussed.

CAT 1 (A): Goal matching & ranking at course level

This CAT was applied twice: (1) at the very beginning of the course, and (2) at the lecture level. During the first lecture and before distributing the course description of ELT Methods 2, the students were formed into eight groups. Then, each student was given a sheet of paper on which two questions were written: (1) *What are your goals for attending this course?* (2) *How can you rank them according to their priority and importance?* The groups were asked to answer and discuss these two questions in 15 minutes. After carrying out the task, the instructor called upon the reporter of the first group to read out and dictate what was written. The instructor drew a table on the board and wrote the goals in it. The same was done with the second group; if the goal was included, a tick would be put in front of it. If it was not included, it would be added to the list. After finishing this process, the goals were ranked according the number of ticks in front of each item. Table (1) below displays these goals, their frequencies and ranks.

Table 1

Goals of ELT Methods 2 as identified by students

Goals*	F	%	Rank
1. How to teach grammar	9	100	1
2. How to teach writing	9	100	1
3. How to teach listening	9	100	1
4. Classroom management	8	89	2
5. Evaluation and testing	7	78	3
6. Lesson planning	6	67	4
7. Teaching speaking	6	67	4
8. Teaching students how to use dictionaries	6	67	4
9. How to adopt continuous assessment	5	56	5
10. Problems of teaching practice	5	56	5
11. Recent approaches in language teaching	5	56	5
12. Relationship between productive and	4	44	6

	receptive skills			
13.	How to deal with individual differences	4	44	6
14.	Teaching English to Basic Ed, Students	4	44	6
15.	Visual aids	3	33	7
16.	How to be a good teacher	3	33	7
17.	Stating goals	3	33	7
18.	Teaching spelling	3	33	7
19.	Dealing with school administration	2	22	8

*These are the exact words of the participants without any change.

Table (1) above displays 19 content goals (points) identified by the students participated in the current study. It also displays the frequencies and ranks of these goals. As indicated in the table, the most frequently mentioned goals are 1 to 11 and the least frequent goals are 12 to 19. As a result of some discussions with the students, it was found that some of the goals (3, 4, 6, and 8) were included in Methods 1; but, unfortunately, were not covered. So, two practical suggestions were discussed in order to overcome this problem. These were: (1) including the goals that should be included in Methods 1 in the term papers and presentations of students, and (2) giving them some focus in Microteaching. In addition, it was indicated that goals 10, 15, 16, 17, and 19 are/should be tackled in other courses such as Teaching Practice, Instructional Objectives and Foundations of Education. The remaining goals are to a large extent similar to the ones identified in the course description shown in Exhibit (1) below.

Exhibit 1
Goals/Topics of ELT Methods 2 as found in the course description

1.	Teaching grammar/ structures
2.	Teaching the productive skills: speaking and writing
3.	Integrating the teaching of 4 language skills
4.	Desuggestopedia
5.	Total Physical Response
6.	The Eclectic Strategy (Eclecticism)
7.	Testing and assessment
8.	Learning strategies training
9.	Teaching English to young learners
10.	Content-based instruction

In the list above, there is, however, one goal (*content-based instruction*) that cannot be matched to any of the goals mentioned by students and found in Table (1). This is probably due to the pragmatic and practical thread found in the goals identified by the students and the fact that in the Omani schools, content-based instruction is not practiced. There are also some goals 3, 8, and 9 that match indirectly to the goals 12, 13, and 14 identified by students.

CAT 1 (B): Goal matching & ranking at lecture level

What was described previously took place at the whole course level. That is, the goals were identified once at the beginning of Methods 2 course. It is worth mentioning here that the same CAT was applied at the session/lecture level as well. At the very beginning of one of the lectures which was specified for teaching structures, a sheet of paper included two questions: *What do you expect me to teach you about structures? How can you rank what you suggest according to their priority and importance?* The same procedures described above were conducted and ended up, unexpectedly, with a very long list including 29 goals (sub-items) about teaching structures (See Appendix 1). The list is very inclusive and refers to

many dimensions about grammar such as approaches to teaching grammar, using L1 to explain grammar, grammar tasks and activities, measuring performance in grammar, grammar sequence, using games for teaching grammar, the necessity of teaching the grammar found in the textbooks, grammar and CALL, etc.

The list also includes a large number of points about grammar given by the respondents in question form such as: *Should we teach grammar? Do we teach grammar deductively or inductively? What is the sequence of teaching a grammar lesson? What should be done if the grammatical item is not clear despite our explanation? Can we integrate grammar teaching into teaching language skills? What should be done with teachers' grammatical mistakes while teaching? Should we use L1 while explaining grammar? Should we start with teaching simple grammar and then move to difficult items? How can we evaluate students' performance in grammar? How can we improve students' weakness at grammar?* Looking critically at these questions and the other points in Appendix (1) would indicate the following:

1. The students are aware of the current approaches which do not advocate direct teaching of grammar including a very extreme approach represented in the question: *Should we teach grammar?*
2. Giving these points in question form may mean that, for the students, the questions constitute critical challenges that need appropriate solutions and that the students are aware of and can self-assess what they need about grammar. Indeed, the list may compose a table of contents for writing a book about grammar; not just some ideas for giving a lecture or two about grammar.
3. The students ask a very significant question: *What is the sequence of teaching a grammar lesson*? In the literature, the answer of this question has been tackled differently according to the various methodological approaches. For example, the difference between the deductive and inductive approach is a matter of sequence, i.e., whether to begin with the rule or to begin with the examples.
4. There is a tendency in the students' answers not to teach grammar separately. To them, it should be integrated into the four language skills.
5. The students reefer to a very important issue that needs to be tackled in the ELT Methods 2 course as well as in research. This is the grammatical mistakes made by teachers while teaching grammar.
6. The students mention a very important point: *Motivating students to learn grammar.* The significance of this point is embedded in the fact that it expresses a shift of focus from teaching to learning.
7. Because grammar is very theoretical, students need to connect teaching it with fun and games.
8. Comparing the goals of teaching grammar mentioned by the students with the instructor's list displayed in Exhibit (2) below would indicate that the goals identified by the students incorporate more than what was planned and hence match all of them.

Exhibit 2

Instructors' Goals for Teaching Grammar

1. Why teaching grammar
2. Form-focused teaching
3. Meaning-focused teaching
4. The deductive approach for teaching grammar
5. The inductive approach for teaching grammar
6. The presentation of a structural form
7. Contexts for introducing new structural form

The topics displayed in Exhibit (2) above, however, do not have any reference to the grammar found in the textbooks used in the Omani context. Accordingly, one of the groups were asked to analyze some grammar tasks found in the EFL textbooks used in the Omani context and then give a presentation about what they had done. It can be concluded that the goal matching and ranking CAT was very beneficial because it helped students to be involved in the classroom discussion and interaction, diagnose their problems, and identify their real needs, and hence guided the instructors to work towards satisfying those needs.

CAT 2: Project Prospectus

According to Angelo and Cross (1993, p. 248), "a prospectus is a brief, structured first-draft plan for a term paper or term project… [It] prompts students to think through elements of the assignment, such as the topic, purpose, intended audience, major questions to be answered, basic organization, and time and resources required". The project prospectus has the following benefits:

1. It assesses students' skill to synthesize/compose what they have learned.
2. It gives the instructor indicators about students' understanding of the topic and the planning skills before commencing working on the project.
3. Students receive early feedback and guidance about the different components of the project and how they are accomplished.

Towards the end of the 2nd lecture, the project prospectus CAT was introduced to the students. Then, they were asked to form research groups and have some readings about the content areas of the course. Next, the members of each group met in order to discuss and choose a topic for their term paper, and then filled in the different components of the Project Prospectus Format shown in Exhibit (3) below.

Exhibit 3
CAT 2: The Project Prospectus Format

Students' Names: ………………………………………………..
Title: Teaching grammar in the Omani context
Major question(s) you hope to answer:
1. Which approach is frequently adopted for teaching grammar? Is it the deductive, inductive or communicative approach?
2. To what extent do teachers of English use L1 while introducing grammatical tasks?
Type of the project: Field work/ Library work:
Both; library work for preparing the theoretical part and field work for determining which approach was adopted.
Work calendar (How will you spread the work out? When will you do it?):
A month: a week for preparing the theoretical part, a week for developing the checklist, a week for the field work, and a week for data analysis
Proposed table of contents/list of major sections:
1. Introduction
2. Importance of teaching grammar
3. Grammar in the EFL textbooks
4. The deductive approach for teaching grammar
5. The inductive approach
6. The communicative approach
7. Method: developing the checklist
8. Applying the checklist
9. Data analysis and discussion
10. Conclusion

Help/ (What do you need in order to do an excellent job?):
Helping build the checklist and finding some references about teaching grammar
Your biggest concern(s) or question(s) about the term paper:
1. Teachers may not accept to attend their classes to observe them holding a sheet of paper and a pen.
2. Dividing the work among the members of the group

(Adapted from Angelo & Cross,1993, p. 249)

Exhibit (3) above displays the final draft of one of nine project prospectus prepared by the students. It includes the skeleton of a term paper and the challenges that students may meet while conducting it. A group of five students prepared the first draft and then discussed it with the instructor. In the light of the instructor's feedback, the research group made the suggested changes and prepared the final draft of the project prospectus before commencing implementing it. It is worth mentioning here that the project prospectus format is useful as it directs students to the dimensions that they should tackle when they do a research project. Traditionally, and before beginning doing a term paper/project, students were used to discuss only the title and its sub-points with the instructor.

CAT 3: Last Minute Paper

In this self-assessment CAT, the class is stopped two or three minutes early and asked to respond briefly to these two questions:
1. What is the most significant point you have understood in the lecture?
2. What is the point you still have questions about?

(Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 148)

The instructor collects the sheets, goes through them and writes his feedback comments. Then, they give the sheets back to students or discuss them next class. The last minute paper CAT has many pedagogical benefits including that it:

1. Provides a quick and extremely written feedback about student learning.
2. Enable faculty to can quickly check how well students are learning what they are teaching.
3. Help faculty decide whether any mid-course corrections are needed.
4. Encourages students to raise questions.
5. Assesses more than mere recall.
6. Develops ability to compose and synthesize ideas.
7. Improves listening skills.
8. Improves skill at paying attention and concentration.
9. Helps to learn facts, concepts, principles and theories in the course.
10. Can be used in large classes because it is quick to administer and analyze.

Due to all the benefits numerated above, the last minute CAT was used more than once. Dividing the students into groups enabled the instructor to have few sheets for reading, giving feedback and discussion. While responding to the first question found in this CAT: *What is the most significant point you have understood in the lecture*? The students mentioned many important points, including (1) overcoming problems of teaching speaking, especially lack of participation of some students versus the domination of the others, (2) using pictures as stimuli for speaking, (3) applying Total Physical Response (TPR) to the Omani Young learners (4) knowing the differences between product and process writing, (5) ways for improving handwriting, (6) using brainstorming for generating ideas while practicing writing, (7) focusing on the humanistic aspects of the learners while teaching the

language, (8) helping students how to learn, and (9) not beginning any class with writing; a listening and/or reading input is required before asking students to write.

In addition to the most significant points mentioned above, the students while responding to the second question of the last minute CAT (*What is the point you still have questions about?*), mentioned some *problematic points* they encountered throughout the course. These points are: (1) process writing takes much time, (2) teaching of grammar can not be escaped, (3) difficulty of applying dessuggestopedia to the Omani context, (4) worrying about some definitions such as CBI (content-based instruction) and ESP (English for Specific Purposes), (5) the difficulty of applying Krachen's approach, which advocates just teaching meaningful language and allowing grammar to take care of itself, (6) teaching the tasks found in the textbook whether interesting or uninteresting, (8) adopting TPR being problematic due to large classes and the nature of the language input; not all lessons include concrete and action verbs, (9) integrating teaching speaking and writing in the classroom, and (10) how to make sure that the language input is interesting for all students. During the session that followed, these problematic points were displayed on a PowerPoint slide, clarified and discussed publicly with the whole class. The new lesson did not begin before making sure that these 10 points were no longer problematic.

CAT 4: The Muddiest point

In this self-assessment CAT, students are asked to jot down a quick response to one question: *What was the muddiest point in the …?* (Angelo and Cross, 1993, p. 154). To complete the question, the instructor can write: lecture, this part, presentation, task, assignment, etc. Also, the meaning of the phrase *muddiest point* can be clarified by adding between brackets these adjectives: unclear, confusing, and hard to understand. It is worth mentioning here that the purpose of this self-assessment CAT is similar to the purpose of the second question in the previous self-assessment CAT (the Minute Paper). So, the instructor may use only one of these two CATs in one class. The muddiest point CAT provides feedback information about the least clear or most confusing point(s) in a topic, task, presentation, etc. The instructor uses that feedback to guide teaching decisions and identify the topics to emphasize and how much time to spend on each.

In the current study, this self-assessment CAT was applied alternatively with the minute paper CAT. The following points were provided by the students who answered the question: *What was the muddiest point in the lecture?*
Exhibit 4

The muddiest points identified by students

> 1. It is not a point; it is whole TPR approach.
> 2. the difference between task and activity
> 3. the difference between task-based teaching and CBI
> 4. the difference between strategy and method
> 5. What is continuous assessment?
> 6. One principle of Desuggestopedia is "Learning is facilitated in a relaxed environment". How can we apply this to the Omani context?
> 7. What is testing? What is evaluation?
> 8. Young learners want just to play. How to involve them in learning rather than just playing.

Exhibit (4) above displays eight difficult or muddy points identified by the students while applying the muddiest point CAT. The students, for example, mentioned that there was not just one single muddy point; it was the whole TPR approach. While discussing these

points during the following lecture, a large number of students, especially the males indicated that they were not satisfied with the principles or techniques of the Total Physical Response as they would not be teachers of young learners. Another muddy point was the applicability of Desuggestopedia in the Omani schools. Some students were entirely against that approach, others thought that it could be employed only in high standard private schools, and still others thought that it could be employed in private language centers. However, the hot debate ended up with a midway approach. It was just making use of some of its applicable techniques and principles and not rejecting it entirely. The other muddy points above were discussed, clarified and became no longer muddy.

CAT 5: The Application Cards

For applying this self-assessment CAT, the instructor, after covering an important principle, generalization, theory or procedure, hands out an index card and asks students to write down at least one practical application for what they have learned (Angelo & Cross, 1993, p. 236). This CAT has many benefits: (1) It helps students to think about possible applications, (2) It helps faculty to know in a flash how well students understand the possible applications of what they have learned, (3) It shows students the relevance of what they are learning and (4) It develops ability to think creatively.

In order to apply this self-assessment CAT, the instructor, after explaining the topic to do with teaching English to young learners (TEYL), handed out a slip of paper to each group of students and asked them to write just one application point for what they have covered in the lecture. After seven minutes, the slips of paper were collected. The following nine applications were given:

1. Teaching young learners requires patience and tolerance (acceptable).
2. Teachers have to make their classes bright and cheerful (great).
3. Learning by doing (great)
4. Singing and using games (great)
5. TPR can be applied in the first cycle of Basic Ed. Schools (acceptable).
6. Using rhyme for teaching the alphabet, months of the year, and numbers (great)
7. Using songs for teaching prepositions (great)
8. Using crosswords for teaching spelling and new vocabulary items (great)
9. Having a short attention and concentration span, young learners need to conduct short tasks; if there is a longer task, it should be divided into sub-tasks (acceptable).

While reading out the applications above, the instructor asked students to give them grades such as great, acceptable, or not acceptable. As shown in the list above seven applications are considered *great* because they can be applied to a large extent for teaching English to young learners, whereas only two applications are considered acceptable because they refer to principles and qualities, not direct applications. However, all these application points indicate that students can assess themselves critically and can perceive the usefulness of what they have covered, thus bridging the gap between theory and practice.

CAT 6: Directed Paraphrasing

According to Angelo and Cross (1993 , p. 232), the purpose of this self-assessment CAT is to develop ability to translate highly sophisticated information into simple language that can be understood by clients or customers. It has more than one pedagogical purpose: (1) providing feedback on students' ability to summarize or restate important information or concepts into their own words, (2) allowing faculty to assess how well students have

understood and internalized learning, (3) improving writing skills, and (4) learning concepts and theories in the subject.

This CAT was applied while teaching one of the methodological approaches in the course called *desuggestopedia*. The instructor distributed a sheet of paper to each group. As displayed in Exhibit (5) below, the sheet includes the rubric of the CAT, the text that would be paraphrased, and a space in which students wrote their directed paraphrasing.

Exhibit 5

CAT 6: Directed Paraphrasing

> In no more than 3 or 4 sentences summarize and paraphrase (in your own words) the definition and main principles of the term Desuggestopedia. Your paraphrase will be directed to a colleague who has not studied any educational courses.
>
> **Desuggestopedia**
> *The application of the study of suggestion to pedagogy, has been developed to help students eliminate the feeling that they cannot be successful or the negative association they may have toward studying and, thus, to help them overcome the barriers to learning. The principles of Desuggestopedia include: cheerful environment, learning from what is present in the environment like posters, trusting and respecting the teacher's authority. Teacher should attempt to desuggest the psychological barriers which students bring to the learning situation. Songs are useful for 'freeing the speech muscles' and for evoking positive emotions. The teacher should integrate indirect positive suggestions into the learning situation. (Larsen-Freeman 2000, p. 73)*
>
> **Paraphrase of 1st group**
> Desuggestopedia is a way in which teacher helps students to get rid of the barriers to learning such as stress and anxiety. This could be achieved through the use of cheerful environment, posters, songs, and being positive with students.
>
> **Paraphrase of 2nd group**
> Desuggestopedia is a learning method in which learning may occur at a faster and cheerful way. The teacher's responsibility is to get red of the psychological barriers to learning that students may have such as the feeling that they cannot be successful and learning English is difficult.
>
> **Paraphrase of 3rd group**
> Georgi Lozanov developed Desuggestopedia for teachers in order to provide a cheerful environment for learning and help students overcome the psychological barriers that hinder their progress. Thus, learning becomes interesting, successful and less stressful.

The three paraphrase examples displayed in Exhibit (5) above include the exact words of the students without any change either in language or ideas. They also include nearly the most important ideas in the original text in a simple and clear language without the use of very specialized terms. This might probably mean that the directed paraphrasing CAT is useful and has the potential to help students to sum up or restate important concepts and principles in the course using their own words. This may also improve their writing skills.

CAT 7: One-sentence Summary

One-sentence summary is the 7th self-assessment CAT used in this study. Although it is very simple, it challenges students to answer the question: *"who does what to whom, when, where, how and why* about a given topic, and then synthesize those answers into a single informative sentence" (Angelo and Cross, 1993:183). This CAT has many benefits including: (1) helping students to summarize a large amount of information on a given topic, (2) improving their study skills, (3) helping them to condense, process and recall information,

and (4) allowing faculty to scan and compare responses quickly and easily. Due to time constraints, this CAT was applied only once while teaching a topic called the eclectic approach to ELT. It calls for using a multi-dimensional approach for teaching, not sticking to using one method. The following are two examples from students' responses.

Exhibit 6

CAT 7: One Sentence Summary

Example (1)
Summarize what you have covered in this lecture into a single informative, grammatically correct, and long summary sentence. You can do this by answering these questions: "Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?"
The Answer
Who?   *the teacher*
Does what?   *applies eclecticism*
To what or whom?   *student*
When?   *during the lesson*
Where?   *in the classroom*
How?   *using more than one method in teaching the lesson*
Why?   *to be sure that those students really understood the lesson*
The Sentence
The teacher applies techniques from different methods   while teaching students in the classroom in order to make sure that the lesson is understood.
Example (2)
Who?   *the teacher.*
Does what?   *teaches how to write a descriptive paragraph about flowers in Oman*
To what or whom?   *students in grade* 5
Where?   *school garden*
When?   *during one of the afternoon classes*
How*?*   *showing them different kinds of flowers*
Why?   *to make learning funny and enjoyable*
The Sentence
During one of the afternoon classes, the teacher helps students of grade 5 how to write a descriptive paragraph about flowers in Oman by taking them to the school garden and showing them different kinds of flowers in order to make learning funny and enjoyable.

If we look deeply at the two examples above, we will observe that the students are able to condense and summarize the essence of the eclectic approach in two sentences. The first is to do with using techniques from different methodological approaches in the classroom in order to help students learn the language. The second sentence refers to a very important technique adopted by the teacher. That is, taking students to the field (school garden) to see for themselves the different flowers in the garden, and to write a descriptive paragraph. Another important point that can be observed is the ability to produce long informative sentences by students, which refers to the linguistic and pedagogical effectiveness of the one sentence summary CAT.

Effectiveness of the self-assessment CATs

In order to measure the effect of the seven self-assessment CATs applied and described previously on the motivation of and involvement of the students participated in the study, two

other self-assessment CATs were used. They were: (1) the chain-notes technique, and (2) the teacher-designed feedback form. These two techniques are also suggested by Angelo and Cross (1993, pp. 322-30). The rational behind suggesting the use of these self-assessment CATs was that the other standardized forms are too general and it takes months to prepare them, whereas the chain-notes CAT and the teacher-designed feedback CAT are short, simple, and easy to develop and apply. They elicit limited, focused responses to very course-specific questions posed by the instructor. In addition, faculty can quickly and easily analyze data obtained and make adjustments in their teaching.

Evaluation CAT 1: Chain-notes

In one of the classes towards the end of the course, this evaluation CAT was applied. The class was allocated for three students' presentations entitled: the applicability of dessuggestopedia to the Omani context, using the eclectic approach to teach some tasks from the textbook, and teaching English to young learners. Two questions were written on a large envelope and it was given to students to pass around. The first question was *what exactly were you doing during the minute before this envelope reached you?* The second question was *what are you paying attention to? (In other words, what are you learning right now?)* . The following are some of the students' responses**.**

Exhibit 7

Students' responses to the chain notes questions

1. I was listening to Abeer taking about the definition of Desuggestopedia. I have learned this definition.
2. I was listening to the preparation and use of posters. I have known the possibility of applying Desuggestopedia to the Omani context.
3. Actually, I was thinking of what to write on the envelope, so I began to focus on the presentation of my colleague in order to be able to write something. I am learning now that teacher should be eclectic in terms of the methodological approaches they are adopting.
4. I was listening to the introduction of the instructor about the chain-notes CAT. I have learned a useful technique for helping students to concentrate and get involved in the class.
5. I was writing some notes about the drawbacks of the eclectic strategy in my agenda. I have learned to be very careful when I adopt the eclectic strategy.
6. I was listening to a part to do with teaching numbers to young learners. I have learned using the rhyming technique for teaching numbers to young learners.
7. I was listening to the instructor commenting on the characteristics of young learners. I learned how to deal with young learners as they are different from adults.
8. At the moment I am listening to a technique for teaching vocabulary to young learners. I have learned that when we introduce a vocabulary item to young learners, we have to join the article with it, e.g. a horse, an apple, an egg, etc.
9. I was listening to the presentation of the colleagues, but I did not like the theoretical part because the instructor covered it in a previous lecture. When they reached the application of Desuggestopedia to the Omani context I began to pay attention. Now I have learned the possibility of applying some techniques of this humanistic approach.
10. I was listening and paying attention to the title of the second presentation: teaching English to young learners, and asked myself if I was going to teach young learners. Indeed, it would be a hard job. I have learned some activities for teaching English to young learners such as the use of songs, games, TPR, draw & color, etc.

The students' responses displayed in Exhibit (7) above refer to a high level of involvement and awareness. They also refer to a large extent of informative theoretical and practical improvement. Response (3), for example, indicates that the student was not paying attention, but when the envelope approached, s/he began to concentrate in order to write a note in the envelope. Response (4) also indicates that the student "was listening to the introduction of the instructor about the chain-notes CAT" and that s/he "had learned a useful technique for helping students to concentrate and get involved in the class".

Evaluation CAT 2: Teacher-designed feedback form

The second evaluation CAT applied in this investigation was the teacher-designed feedback. As shown in Appendix (2), it has a closed-ended part including items to do with the clarity, interest level, and usefulness of the self-assessment CATs used throughout in the study. These items are found on a 4-point scale. It also has three open-ended questions. Two questions are about positive and difficult (or negative) things done by the instructor, and the third is about what students suggest in order to improve learning in the course. This simple teacher-designed feedback format was administered to 48 students during one of the classes towards the end of the course. Forty three forms were returned and analyzed descriptively as shown in Table (2) below.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of the 7 self-assessment CATs

The CATS applied throughout the course	Clarity		Interest		Usefulness	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Directed paraphrasing	3.63	.489	3.49	.631	3.63	.578
2. The muddiest point	3.60	.583	3.35	.613	3.51	.668
3. The application cards	3.47	.702	3.23	.684	3.51	.631
4. One-sentence summary	3.47	.702	3.45	.593	3.51	.668
5. Project prospectus	3.47	.592	3.21	514	3.44	.502
6. Goal matching and ranking	3.28	.549	3.28	.630	3.37	.655
7. The last minute paper	3.14	.608	3.12	.586	3.37	.536

*Number of students 43.

Table (2) above includes the means and standard deviations of the students' responses on the three dimensions of the teacher-designed format. As shown in Appendix (2) the teacher-designed format has a 4-point scale including three intervals. The continuous values of the descriptors on this scale are calculated as follows:

1. From 1.00 to less than 1.75 means totally unclear, totally boring and useless.
2. From 1.75 to less than 2.50 means somewhat unclear, boring and not very useful.
3. From 2.50 to less 3.25 means mostly clear, interesting and useful.
4. From 3.25 to 4.00 means very clear, very interesting and very useful.

As shown in Table (2) and according to the values above all the means are between 3.12 and 3.63. This means that the respondents perceive the self-assessment CATs as very clear, very interesting and very useful or mostly clear, interesting, and useful. There are, however, slight differences between the perceptions of the respondents towards the seven self-assessment CATs. The directed paraphrasing CAT, though is challenging as shown in Exhibit (5), is given the highest means for clarity and usefulness (3.63), whereas, the last minute paper is given the least means for clarity (3.14) and interest (3.12). This might be due to the high degree of clarity of the objectives and applications of the directed paraphrasing CAT. It might also be due to the fact that the directed paraphrasing CAT is a self-study

strategy that is used frequently by students, whereas the instructor uses the last minute paper for checking purposes. Another finding is displayed in Table (3) below.

Table 3

Means & standard deviations of the total items on the three dimensions of the teacher-designed format

	No.	Mean	SD
Usefulness of the CATs	43	24.35	2.34
Clarity of the CATs	43	23.98	2.42
Interest level of the CATs	43	23.05	1.88

As shown in Table (3) above, the respondents give the highest mean to the usefulness dimension (24.35), and the least mean to the interest dimension (23.05). However, the differences between the three means seem to be slight and statistically insignificant. This might be due to the pragmatic views of the respondents; they highly perceive the usefulness, clarity, and interest of the 7 self-assessment CATs.

The second part in the teacher-designed format, as shown in Appendix (2), incorporates three open-ended questions. The first requests students to mention one or two things that their instructor did that really helped them learn *Methods of Teaching English* 2. The respondents gave useful comments to do with the efficiency of the self-assessment CATs used throughout the course. These are some examples: "Using the project prospectus helped me to do the project"; "The muddiest point CAT was helpful; it made the instructor revise the points I did not understand in the course"; "Summarizing parts of the course into one sentence is a very challenging task. .. When I went home I tried it with my roommate"; " Distributing a paper at the beginning of the course and asking us about our needs"; "All the CATs we have used are useful". The respondents also mentioned many good points to do with the instructor's behavior in the class such as: "simplifying the ideas in the course and linking it to the Omani context"; "He always refers to the practical part of the course and the real classroom, which makes things clearer for us"; "Telling real stories from the field"; "When students are presenting you asked the others to take notes, then you choose one student randomly to sum up what has been presented", etc.

The second open-ended question on the teacher-designed format, (see Appendix 2), requests students to give one or two examples of specific things their instructor did that made it difficult for them to learn *Methods of Teaching English 2.* In response to this question, the students mentioned these significant points:

1. Much learning material.
2. No revision of what we covered in the previous lecture.
3. The very long time of the lecture. I could not concentrate.
4. Steps for applying Desuggestopedia are difficult.
5. It is better to cover a less number of topics.
6. He talks too much about every point. We need short direct explanation without many details.
7. A lot of theories [methodological approaches] to be covered.
8. Giving more than one topic in the same lecture.

As shown from the points above, the students have the ability to self-assess the content of the course they are covering and the teaching strategies of their instructor. They, for example, think that in ELT quality is much better than quantity, and hence suggest reducing the content of the course especially the procedures required for applying dessuggestopedia and the number of the methodological approaches covered. The students

also draw the attention of the instructor to critical points that might hinder their learning such as beginning the class without revising the previous lecture, using much theory in teaching, giving detailed explanation.

The third open-ended question on the teacher-designed format requests students to suggest one or two specific, practical changes their instructor could make in order to help them improve learning in the course. The students provide a long list including the following:

1. We need more time to interact and talk.
2. Using the muddiest point every lecture. It is very helpful.
3. Reduce the content a little bit.
4. Giving the students examples just about the different aspects of language they are going to teach in the future.
5. Giving students more time for presentation without interruption on the part of the instructor.
6. The instructor of the theoretical part should teach the practical part (i.e. Microteaching) in order to observe the application of what they cover in the theoretical part.
7. Reducing the topics and learning materials covered.
8. Instead of having presentations and research projects, it is better to have one task only.
9. Students' presentation should not be about topics covered by the instructor in the class.

In order to foster the motivation of EFL students, increase their degree of involvement in the class, and hence improve the content and instructional procedures of *ELT Methods 2*, the points on the list above should be taken into account on the part of the instructor.

Summary and conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the effect of using some self-assessment techniques on the motivation and involvement of EFL students at Sultan Qaboos University. Thus, we reviewed the various definitions of the concept "self-assessment" and the studies that were conducted in order to investigate its effect on other ELT variables such as language skills, linguistic competence, self-efficacy, and learner autonomy. As a result, it was hypothesized that self-assessment can foster the motivation and increase the degree of class involvement of EFL students at Sultan Qaboos University. In order to verify this hypothesis, seven self-assessment CATs were adapted and injected while teaching the ELT Methods 2 course to a group of 48 students. The self-assessment CATs used were: (1) goal matching and ranking, (2) project prospectus, (3) last minute paper, (4) directed paraphrasing, (5) application cards, (6) the muddiest point, and (7) the one-sentence summary. In order to measure the effectiveness of the seven CATs, the students' product while carrying out the various tasks in the course was analyzed. In addition, two other evaluation CATs were applied (the chain-notes and the teacher-designed format). It was found that self-assessment helped improve and foster the motivation of the students and raised the extent of involvement and participation in the classroom, and that the students perceived it as useful and interesting. However, in this study an important variable has not been investigated. It is the effect of self-assessment on the achievement of EFL students. This might be the target of an experimental, further study.

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Appendix (1)
Goals of teaching grammar as identified by students

	Goals*	Freq.	%	Rank
1.	Do we teach grammar deductively or inductively?	9	100	1
2.	Effective techniques for teaching grammar	9	100	1
3.	What is the sequence of teaching a grammar lesson?	9	100	1
4.	Should we teach grammar?	8	89	2
5.	Connecting teaching L_2 grammar with L_1 grammar	8	89	2
6.	Teaching grammar found in the EFL Omani textbooks	7	78	3
7.	How to plan a grammar task/lesson	7	78	3
8.	What should be done if the grammatical item is not clear despite our explanation?	7	78	3
9.	Motivating students to learn grammar	7	78	3
10.	Teaching grammar through language	6	67	4
11.	Explaining structures with reference to Arabic grammar	6	67	4
12.	Strategies for teaching grammar	6	67	4
13.	Can we integrate grammar teaching into teaching language skills?	5	56	5
14.	Let us help Ss to read before teaching them grammar	4	44	6
15.	What should be done with teachers' grammatical mistakes while teaching?	4	44	6
16.	Should we use L1 while explaining grammar?	3	33	7
17.	Using technology for teaching grammar	3	33	7
18.	How to use games and songs for teaching grammar	2	22	8
19.	Different aspects of teaching grammar	2	22	8
20.	Teaching grammar gradually	2	22	8
21.	Problems of teaching grammar	2	22	8
22.	Should we start with teaching simple grammar and then move to difficult items?	2	22	8
23.	How to evaluate students' performance in grammar?	2	22	8
24.	The relationship between grammar mastery and effective use of language	1	11	9
25.	How to improve students' weakness at grammar	1	11	10
26.	The appropriate materials for teaching grammar	1	11	10
27.	Appropriate activities for teaching grammar	1	11	10
28.	Motivating students to learn grammar	1	11	10
29.	Teaching grammar through fun	1	11	10

* These items are written as given by students without any change in structure or wording

Appendix (2)
Teacher-designed feedback format

Dear students

The following are the self-assessment CATs you used/applied throughout this course. Please, read the items whish refer to those techniques and circle the responses you most agree with. (Please, don't write your name.)

I.	*On the scale below, please rate the clarity of the following CATs.*	4 Very clear	3 Mostly Clear	2 Somewhat unclear	1 Totally unclear
1.	Goal matching and ranking	4	3	2	1
2.	One-sentence summary	4	3	2	1
3.	The last minute paper	4	3	2	1
4.	Project prospectus	4	3	2	1
5.	Directed paraphrasing	4	3	2	1
6.	The muddiest point	4	3	2	1
7.	The application cards	4	3	2	1
II.	*Overall, how interesting did you find these CATS?*	*4* *Very interesting*	*3* *interesting*	*2* *Boring*	*1* *Totally boring*
8.	Goal matching and ranking	4	3	2	1
9.	One-sentence summary	4	3	2	1
10.	The last minute paper	4	3	2	1
11.	Project prospectus	4	3	2	1
12.	Directed paraphrasing	4	3	2	1
13.	The muddiest point	4	3	2	1
14.	The application cards	4	3	2	1
III.	*Overall, how useful are these CATS?*	*4* *Very useful*	*3* *Useful*	*2* *Not very useful*	*1* *Useless*
15.	Goal matching and ranking	4	3	2	1
16.	One-sentence summary	4	3	2	1
17.	The last minute paper	4	3	2	1
18.	Project prospectus	4	3	2	1
19.	Directed paraphrasing	4	3	2	1
20.	The muddiest point	4	3	2	1
21.	The application cards	4	3	2	1

IV. Give one or two things that your instructor did that really helped you learn *Methods of Teaching English* 2.

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

V. Give one or two examples of specific things your instructor did that made it difficult for you to learn *Methods of Teaching English* 2.

…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

VI. Suggest one or two specific, practical changes your instructor could make that would help you improve your learning in this course (*Methods of Teaching English* 2)

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Thanks for cooperation
The researchers

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