

**Investigating English teachers' beliefs and  
practices in relation to the Continuous Assessment  
reform in the Sultanate of Oman**

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## **Dedication**

In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of the entire world.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis presents the findings of a study, which investigated the beliefs, and practices of teachers of English with regard to the Continuous Assessment (henceforth CA) reform in the assessment system in the Sultanate of Oman. The study also examined how teachers' beliefs and other contextual factors influence the way teachers interpret and implement the CA reform. The ultimate aim of the study was to develop an understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual CA practice, which as a result extends our understandings of the implementation of CA and the challenges that influence the process of implementation.

The study adopted a triangulation design in which both quantitative and qualitative methods complemented each other. It started by exploring the beliefs and practices of 237 teachers of English in a questionnaire. It then explored those beliefs and practices of CA in the follow-up interviews with six working teachers of English, and through observations of specific classroom assessment practices. Finally, it probed the cognitive bases of their practices through post-observation interviews.

The analysis of the data pointed to a large gap between teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their actual assessment practices. Although in the questionnaire they generally expressed strong positive beliefs about the value of CA as an assessment approach and re-affirmed those beliefs in the follow-up interviews, they mostly showed a limited uptake of CA implementation in real practice. The study highlighted complex relationships amongst the CA reform, teachers' practices, teachers' beliefs, and certain contextual factors. The study revealed that these contextual factors are interrelated and collectively widen the mismatch between teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their actual practice and to the limited uptake of CA implementation.

This study illustrates the value of studying the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices in order to develop an understanding of the implementation of assessment reforms, what teachers do while implementing them and how their beliefs and other contextual factors influence the way they interpret and implement such major educational reforms.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

As this study is based on the educational context of the Sultanate of Oman, the thesis starts with an introductory chapter that provides a general background description of the educational system in Oman. The chapter gives an overview of the context of the study. Firstly, it describes the educational context in Oman with particular reference to the process of shifting from the former education system to the current one. Secondly, it presents and discusses the implementation of the new system, known as 'Basic Education'. Thirdly, it explains how the CA system, as part of the Basic Education Reform, was implemented. Finally, the chapter discusses some of the challenges that appear to be influencing the implementation of CA in Oman and then provides a rationale for the study.

### **1.1 Setting the scene**

During the period prior to the HM Sultan Qaboos becoming the ruler of Oman in 1970, religious schools were the only formal and traditional provider of education. Besides studying the Holy Quran, learners were educated in the basic principles of reading and writing. However, since the accession of HM Sultan Qaboos, Oman has witnessed many changes and developments in all aspects of life including education. The first phase of educational change started in 1970 when the government gave particular attention to education and considered it one of the most important sectors of human development. This phase introduced an educational system called "General Education" (henceforth GE) in both public and private schools. The GE system consisted of 12 years of schooling: the primary stage (Grades 1 - 6), the preparatory stage (Grades 7 - 9) and the secondary stage (Grades 10 - 12). In the phase of GE, the Ministry of Education (henceforth MOE) focused more on the quantity of education rather than quality by spreading education as broadly as possible throughout all parts of Oman (Issan, 2011).

GE, within limited resources and manpower, succeeded to some extent to provide education to the whole country within a relatively short period. However, many studies conducted in Oman during the later stages of applying the system indicates that some aspects of GE did not seem to fulfil the needs of society (AL Balushi, 2002; Al-Hammami, 1999; Al-Toubi, 1998; Al Barwani, 2002). For example, research by Al

Barwani (2002, cited in Issan, 2011) notes some shortcomings in the following aspects of the educational system: the teaching methods did not seem satisfy the needs of learners; the educational system did not seem to follow current advances in educational technology; preference in the system was for increasing the number of schools in the country rather than for enhancing the quality of learning; the assessment system was based on memorizing facts and information; learners' English Language skills did not appear well-developed; there was a shortage in the training of teachers.

Throughout the world, education has gradually moved towards considering individuals' learning needs. As UNESCO suggests, all societies must recognise the basic needs of an individual to receive a foundation of knowledge, attitudes and values and skills on which to build in later life for their own benefit and that of their society (World Declaration on Education for all, Jomtien, 1990, cited in Issan, 2011). The MOE has responded to this call by the reform programme, which started in 1989/99. This reform was initiated by implementing the Basic Education (henceforth BE) system which gradually replaced the old GE system. The BE system has two cycles: Cycle 1 (Grades 1–4) and Cycle 2 (Grades 5-10). The official entrance age to Grade 1 of Cycle 1 is 6 years (UNESCO, 2000). Further details about BE will be presented in the next section.

The stage after BE is Post-Basic Education. It lasts for two years of schooling (Grades 11&12). It aims to continue developing essential working skills, and to prepare learners for higher education. Also, it introduces learners to the values that prepare them for future careers (MOE, 2011). Having provided a brief overview of education in Oman, the next section focuses mainly on the features of BE.

## **1.2 Features of Basic Education in Oman**

The implementation of BE in Oman involved a comprehensive reform of the educational process. Its philosophy is to cater for the present and future needs of the learners. It aims at providing children with the basic educational needs of information, knowledge and skills that develop their learning according to their interests, aptitudes and characteristics. In this sense, a number of reforms were made with regard to all teaching and learning aspects: e.g. the curriculum, schooling periods, training of teachers and the assessment system (MOE, 2011).

As emphasized by the Omani Minister of Education: the reform covered the whole of the Basic Education curriculum, with all its constituent parts, and included the introduction of new subjects, as a response to modern needs, and an update of teaching method. Access to technology and modern aids was also considered to support the efforts of the teachers. Planning for professional development in all its categories was also given special attention at the ministry, and an active strategy was established for training and continuing professional development of teachers (MOE., 2008).

As a result, the MOE has gone through ambitious programmes to upgrade the qualifications of teachers to implement the new system, one of which was the BA Educational Studies (TESOL) degree programme of the University of Leeds. It aimed to upgrade the teaching skills and knowledge of Omani English language teachers and to develop their abilities to carry out classroom-based research (MOE, 2011). This helped them contribute to the development of English language teaching and research in Oman. Moreover, the MOE offers in-service training to teachers and supervisors of all subjects, with a wide range of courses about curriculum, procedures and assessment practices. A number of central and regional workshops and seminars are run during every academic year to support them and to help them to develop professionally (MOE, 2011).

This in-service professional development of teachers was implemented alongside the introduction of new curricula for all subjects, placing more emphasis on teaching English, using information technology, increasing school hours and the academic year (Issan, 2011). For the English subject, a communicative curriculum called “English for Me” (EFM) covering Grades 1 to 12 was designed to promote contemporary thinking in ELT among learners (Borg, 2006a). That is, it aims to provide learners with the opportunity to explore a range of areas of language skills and to develop communicative language use (MOE, 2001-2002). Also, as Borg (2006a) adds, it aims to provide more emphasis on meaningful and purposeful language use, by using self-assessment and providing a variety of interactive and motivating language learning experiences.

The BE system was designed to provide learners with opportunities to learn through a variety of teaching and learning approaches (MOE, 2014). Therefore, teachers have been trained to employ teaching strategies to develop skills and attitudes such as autonomous and cooperative learning, critical thinking, problem solving, research and investigative techniques and creativeness (MOE, 2014). When acquiring these skills and strategies teachers would be expected to help learners to work individually, in pairs, in small



groups and as a whole class. They are also encouraged to use teaching strategies which aid learners to search for information using different resources and to cooperate and support each other through the learning process (MOE, 2014).

### **1.3 The new assessment system**

The old assessment system in Oman was mainly based on end-of-term exams, which aimed to test the four skills, grammar and vocabulary independently. Many Omani researchers found that the exam-based system seemed to encourage memorization by the learners and therefore promote teaching through memorization (Al-Toubi, 1998; Al-Hammami, 1999; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2010; Issan and Gomaa, 2010; Al-Issa, ND.). In his research Al-Toubi (1998) finds that one of the reasons behind the poor level in English of the Omani learners was the exam-based system, which seemed to lower learners' motivation to learn the language. In addition, Al-Toubi (1998) and Al-Issa (ND.) reveal that exams, in the old system, encouraged a considerable amount of memorization and reproduction of information, while at the same time ignored the need to arouse learners' interest in learning. They explain that the main purpose for learners was to memorize the textbook content to pass their exams without having clear purposes for their learning.

As a response to such research and because of the introduction of the BE system, the MOE realised that there was a need to change the assessment of learners to suit the new system. In his announcement of the functions of the BE system, Yahya Al Sulaimi, the Minister of Education at that time, states "the examination-driven assessment system is being amended to include the use of a wide range of assessment and evaluation instruments" (UNESCO, 2011, p. 1). Therefore, the BE reform introduced in 2004/5 a new assessment system, with CA being given greater prominence. This was reflected in the assessment arrangements across the curriculum, including English. This system kept the formal testing in the form of end of semester tests, but also introduced alternative forms of assessment that were expected to empower the classroom teachers and provide them with the autonomy and authority to assess their learners based on their professional expertise during the school year.

As this study investigates the implementation of CA by English teachers, the focus here is on the introduction of CA for the English subject. The new system comprised assessment methods conducted during the process of the two semesters of the school

year, which was referred to as CA, and end of semester tests conducted by the end of each semester. Marks are awarded to both CA and end of semester tests, which are combined for grading and reporting purposes. In the new assessment system (from 2004/05 until 2010/11), English teachers are required to assess by CA in Cycle 1 schools (Grades 1-4, testing was not introduced as a formal component of assessment in Cycle 1). In Cycle 2 schools (Grades 5-9), CA was given a high weight of 70% and 30% for formal testing. In the higher Grades 10-12, the formal end of semester test was given a weight of 60%, while the remaining 40% was allocated to CA (MOE, 2007b; MOE, 2010). The high weightings for CA of up to 70% reflected the principles of BE reform to provide more flexibility to teachers to use assessment that was not based on summative judgement of learners but that was formative and provided more opportunities to enhance the process of teaching and learning (MOE, 2007b; MOE, 2010).

However, some changes were introduced in the weighting of CA and formal testing in the school year 2011/2012 (the year when the study was conducted). During this period the teachers were required to assess learners of Grades 5-9 on the basis of three methods of assessment: CA (40%), class tests (20%) and end of semester tests (40%); and to assess Grade 10's learners on the basis of two methods: CA (40%) and end of semester tests (60%) (MOE, 2011-2012). These changes came as a result of a teachers' strike in 2011, in which Omani Public School teachers made a list of demands. One of these was a demand to reduce the weighting of CA and give more role to exams (Alqalamalmudhea, 2011). At that time the teachers claimed that their learners' poor behaviour and efforts was due to CA because they thought that learners do not need to make much effort to get good grades in the CA system (Alqalamalmudhea, 2011). The MOE reacted by giving more formality to class tests (20%) (Before the changes class tests were part of CA) and adding 10% to semester final tests.

#### **1.4 Continuous Assessment**

As described by the MOE,

Continuous Assessment provides a way of collecting information about student learning throughout the school year, primarily by regular observation and evaluation of students' performance in normal classroom conditions. (MOE, 2007b, p. 2)

I will describe below the techniques and the procedures the teachers of English are required to use for the purpose of implementing CA. As the focus of this study is on

Cycle 2 teachers of English (Grades 5-10), I only use the guidelines of CA of that cycle as described in the assessment handbook applied in Cycle 2 schools (see details about the Assessment Handbooks in 1.4.2).

The CA guidelines consider planning for CA an important stage in the CA implementation. They expect teachers to set some specific CA aims to be achieved in every lesson they teach based on the learning outcomes which learners are expected to achieve. In addition, the teacher is required to consider in his/her planning for CA the information, which has been obtained from the previous lessons. This includes noting down some specific learners to be observed and assessed during the lesson and taking notes about them (MOE, 2010). Also, as suggested by the CA guidelines, it is essential that the criteria to be used for assessing learners by CA, its procedures and techniques are clearly communicated and shared with all the learners in an early stage of the school year (MOE, 2011-2012).

For the purpose of collecting CA data about learners' achievements and progress in particular English language elements, the CA guidelines expect teachers to use a number of assessment tools and techniques: classroom observation, portfolios, project work, classwork, homework, group work, quizzes, generic tasks, presentations, self-assessment and giving feedback to learners (MOE, 2011-2012). However, the guidelines note the following:

(Note: Regarding formative and summative uses of assessment, all of these tools and techniques can be used for both purposes, except for the final two items —‘Self-Assessment’ and ‘Giving Feedback to Students’ — which clearly have a formative, rather than a summative, focus.)  
(MOE, 2010, p.2)

Observation is the main CA technique required by the guidelines. In this technique, teachers are expected to pay close attention to the learner and his/her use of the English language during normal classroom activities. As suggested by the guidelines, this process involves more than simply noticing what is going on, but also involves thinking about and trying to understand what has been observed. The guidelines suggest the following qualities of using observation:

Effective observation also involves two further qualities. Objectivity allows the teacher to see what is actually happening, and to make a fair assessment, without being influenced by pre-conceptions (whether positive or negative) about the student concerned. Sensitivity allows the teacher to handle this kind of assessment in a tactful, encouraging way,

which gives students a fair chance to show what they can do.(MOE, 2010, p.2)

In addition, the CA guidelines expect teachers to make conscious use of the following strategies to assist them in obtaining assessment data by observation:

- Include, as a standard part of their lesson plans, a note of any potential opportunities for assessment during the lesson;
- Build pair work / group work activities into each lesson and observe closely while students interact during these activities;
- Identify beforehand four or five students whose performance he/she is going to observe closely during the lesson;
- Focus particularly on students whose assessment data is so far either lacking, unclear or (for some reason) doubtful;
- Without making it too 'obvious', give opportunities to individual students or groups of students who are often 'quiet' or 'not participating';
- Keep a notebook or piece of paper ready for brief, spontaneous notes on student performances that occur naturally as part of the lesson. (MOE, 2010, p.2)

The CA guidelines expect teachers to make use of all the assessment tools and techniques mentioned above in order to assess the learning outcomes of each language element and sub-element which learners are expected to achieve. The learning outcomes are divided into elements: i.e. listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. As the guidelines suggest, there are two types of learning outcomes: general outcomes: i.e. brief statements of the main learning outcomes and specific outcomes: i.e. the lesser outcomes which are included under each main outcome (see, for example, Figure 1) (MOE, 2011-2012). There is a specific rating scale for each learning outcome and each one describes five different levels of achievement (see, for example, Figure 1). These 'descriptors' usually consist of three to four statements. Each of these statements covers a different aspect of the learners' performance, for example, for interactive writing: 'impact on reader', 'achievement of purpose', 'appropriacy' and 'correctness'. Teachers are required to use their professional judgement to interpret these statements and apply them when assessing learners in practice. They are also expected to consult with other teachers in order to create a shared understanding of what these statements mean (MOE, 2011-2012).

As the guidelines recommend, there is no fixed weighting of marks for CA tools. The CA guidelines require teachers to combine the assessment information gained from any CA tool with all the other information which has been obtained from other sources of CA (MOE, 2011-2012). Together, this will form the basis for awarding CA marks, using the appropriate rating scales provided in the assessment handbook (see for example Figure

1). For example, in order to assess learners' portfolios the teacher is not expected to award a mark for the portfolio as a whole but to separate entries of the learners' work related to the language learning outcomes: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. That is, the teacher is expected to think of the material in the portfolio as further evidence of the learners' abilities in the learning outcomes, and award marks according to the relevant CA rating scale(s). However, the teacher is also expected to comment and give formative feedback on any aspect of the portfolio, e.g. organisation, appearance, selection of contents (MOE, 2011-2012).

The teachers are expected to use the information gathered by the various CA tools for two assessment purposes. Firstly, formative, for the purpose of helping learners to achieve the relevant learning outcomes and as a basis for regular monitoring of their performance towards supporting them to achieve those learning outcomes. Its purpose is to provide assistance and support towards improving standards. Secondly, summative, so as to provide evidence for grading and reporting; its purpose is to measure standards by awarding marks and grades (MOE, 2011-2012). As stated in the assessment handbook (MOE, 2011-2012, p.6), "Both Formative and Summative Assessment are necessary and important; neither should be neglected".

In addition, the guidelines require teachers to keep up-to-date notes of all individual learners' CA to track their performance throughout the whole year, rather than just the semester. The guidelines expect these records to provide easily accessible data for the following tasks that teachers need to do for CA purposes:

- planning for CA;
- tracking learners' performances;
- providing regular feedback to learners;
- designing and monitoring any remedial (or other) action taken;
- making decisions on awarding marks of CA;
- writing descriptive reports on learners;
- providing evidence for supervisors; parents, head teachers, moderators and other officials (MOE, 2011-2012).

Teachers are expected to start keeping these records early in the school year and to be systematic and develop regular routines for working on them, so that they are kept for all learners. They are also required to note and comment on different features of a learner's

performance in general or in a particular language element or outcome, their attitudes, their behaviours and their learning strategies. To support these records teachers are also asked to make references to documents and learners' pieces of work from different sources (e.g. in the learner's portfolio, in the skills book, work projects, interaction with peers) (MOE, 2011-2012).

With regard to using the information gathered through CA formatively for giving feedback to learners, the guidelines suggest that feedback can be given depending on the circumstances and the judgment of the teacher either to individual learners, or to groups of learners, or to the whole class. It can be given either immediately after CA or when it is appropriate depending on the teacher's plans. It can be given orally or, where appropriate, in writing; in English or, where necessary, in the learner's own language (MOE, 2011-2012). However, teachers are expected to be selective, by focusing on quality of feedback rather than quantity and by giving feedback according to the stage of learning and the need of the learner (MOE, 2011-2012).

Teachers are also expected to gather CA information from their learners' self-assessments. In self-assessment learners are encouraged to assess their own strengths and weaknesses, their own learning strategies, and the quality of their own work (MOE, 2011-2012). This is encouraged by the use of various self-assessment activities to be found at the end of each unit in the learners' course book (teachers are also expected to design similar self-assessment activities for their learners). In these activities, learners are asked to reflect on their learning experiences and to ask themselves some basic questions. As the guidelines suggest, the teachers are expected to make use of the information gathered from learners' self-assessments for formative purposes such as setting plans for supporting strengths and weaknesses of learners and for informing his/her own teaching. However, the CA guidelines suggest that asking learners to reflect on their own performances can be challenging for them. Therefore, they suggest that teachers support them until they develop a general awareness of self-assessment process, for example by providing them, in the early stages, with ready-made documents such as check-lists, forms and questionnaires, which allow learners to focus on their strengths and weaknesses, study habits, strategies and preferences (MOE, 2011-2012).

As suggested by the CA guidelines, it is essential that the criteria to be used for assessing learners by CA, its procedures and techniques are clearly communicated and shared with

all the learners (MOE, 2011-2012). However, the MOE depends on teachers to convey these criteria to the learners, as there is no Arabic version of them.

OUTCOME # 5	RATING SCALE # 5	
<p><b>Can write and respond to letters and e-mails.</b></p>	<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on intended reader(s) is <u>very positive</u>.</li> <li>- Writing clearly succeeds in achieving its purpose.</li> <li>- Uses language which is appropriate to reader and context.</li> <li>- A fair range of structures and vocabulary, with a good level of accuracy.</li> </ul>
<p>These <b>Interactive</b> texts may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- informal letters (to friends and relatives)</li> <li>- e-mails</li> <li>- postcards</li> <li>- notes/messages</li> <li>- invitations</li> <li>- letters of complaint</li> <li>- application letters, etc</li> </ul> <p>and, where appropriate, replies to these texts.</p> <p>Writing these texts involves the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adapt writing appropriately for different purposes and readers.</li> <li>- organize ideas and information into a coherent text.</li> <li>- use discourse markers correctly.</li> <li>- combine sentences together using a range of cohesive devices.</li> <li>- use grammar and vocabulary appropriately and correctly.</li> <li>- use capital letters and punctuation marks.</li> <li>- write with clear, legible hand-writing.</li> <li>- evaluate, edit and improve their own draft texts.</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on intended reader(s) is <u>fairly positive</u>.</li> <li>- Writing has reasonable success in achieving its purpose.</li> <li>- There are clear attempts to use language appropriate to reader and context.</li> <li>- Grammar and vocabulary are reasonably correct, though limited in range.</li> </ul>
	<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on intended reader(s) is <u>mixed</u>.</li> <li>- Writing has partially achieved its main purpose, <u>but</u>:</li> <li>- Some of the language used is inappropriate to reader and context.</li> <li>- There is a noticeable lack of accuracy in the use of grammar and vocabulary.</li> </ul>
	<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on intended reader(s) is <u>rather negative</u>.</li> <li>- Writing only has very limited success in achieving its purpose.</li> <li>- There is little evidence of any attempt to use appropriate language.</li> <li>- Grammar/Vocabulary contain frequent serious errors.</li> </ul>
	<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Impact on intended readers(s) is <u>very negative</u>.</li> <li>- Writing clearly fails to achieve its intended purpose.</li> <li>- The language used is extremely limited and/or seriously distorted and/or very inappropriate.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1: Outcomes & rating scales for interactive writing for Grades 7-9 (MOE, 2011-2012, p. 70)**

### 1.4.1 The MOE's rationale for CA reform

The MOE argues that using CA as a new approach for assessing learners' progress (MOE, 2007b) will bring benefits. Each paragraph in this section reports a different element of the Ministry's case for CA.

First, the MOE claims that CA encourages the idea of providing a positive view of assessment as a natural part of the teaching-learning process and it provides a valid assessment of learning outcomes. Moreover, the MOE suggests that CA could provide a more balanced picture of learners' attainment as it consists of a variety of CA techniques used at various stages of their learning. Teachers would therefore have sufficient information to identify any learning difficulties of their learners at an early stage, and can promptly formulate possible remedial action (MOE, 2010). Also, the MOE claims that CA provides more opportunity for teachers to track the on-going progress and development of individual learners (MOE, 2010). The MOE further suggests that CA has

the advantage of motivating learners to work hard consistently if they know that their everyday work in class contributes to their own assessment (MOE, 2010).

According to the MOE, giving feedback to learners during the process of CA is another essential benefit of CA (MOE, 2010). CA allows teachers to find out regularly about learners' progress, their achievements and also their weaknesses and thus, teachers can keep learners up-to-date about their performance by giving them feedback consistently. MOE claims that as a consequence of CA the teacher can inform learners of what to do in order to improve and also provide specific, concrete suggestions as to where and how the work could be improved. As the MOE suggests, this feedback by the teacher therefore helps learners to become aware of the desired standard of performance, encourage them to compare the actual performance with the desired performance, and thus to take action to close the gap between the two (MOE, 2010).

The MOE also claims that self-assessment is another benefit of CA. Learners are encouraged as a part of CA to assess their own performance and achievement regularly according to some specific given criteria. The MOE indicates that this self-assessment may increase learners' motivation as it involves them in the assessment of their learning and also promotes their reflection on what they have learnt (MOE, 2010). It argues that this process helps them to gradually become autonomous learners, capable of deciding for themselves what they need to learn and how to learn it (MOE, 2010).

According to MOE (2010), using CA to assess learners' progress can provide teachers with the opportunity to assess the suitability of their teaching techniques and consider changes according to learners' needs. Moreover, it offers teachers the opportunity to make stronger links between teaching, learning and assessment.

Another rationale of CA reform provided by the MOE is its claim that CA can lead to more cooperation between teachers, which in turn can support the assessment process. MOE (2010) suggests an informal moderation to be carried out, as a process of on-going consultation between teachers during the implementation of CA. It states that this process be conducted at a local level, particularly in schools, with teachers coming together to compare notes and discuss learners' work. The purpose is to arrive at a shared understanding of the criteria used for assessing the work and awarding different marks or grades.



As the study is concerned with English teachers' beliefs about and practices of CA, the next section discusses the in-service training of English teachers and other ways provided by the MOE for informing teachers about CA implementation.

#### **1.4.2 Informing teachers about CA reform**

It is worth mentioning that some of the information presented here (which does not have a reference) is based on my observations as a former supervisor of English teachers in Dhahira who witnessed the CA reform from the introduction in 2004-2005 to 2010-2011.

CA was first introduced to teachers of English as a part of the new assessment system at the beginning of the school year 2004/2005. In that year a very detailed assessment handbook (Student Assessment Document for English, SAD, 2004) was issued to introduce the new system to teachers and supervisors of English. SAD is an assessment handbook which was designed by the MOE to provide guidelines for English teachers on the assessment of learners studying English in Grades 1 to 12 of BE. It includes detailed descriptions and specific information on assessment techniques, procedures, forms of reporting and recording, weightings tables and glossaries. There is a separate SAD for each cycle of BE which often includes some specific techniques to be used according to assessment needs of that particular cycle. This document is distributed in electronic and hard copy form to all schools and kept as an official document for reference purposes.

In SAD, teachers were given very detailed guidelines and explanations on how to use the new assessment system. Other hasty arrangements were also made to introduce the new assessment system to the teachers of English, firstly by asking the supervisors of English to study these guidelines in SAD so that they could provide training to senior teachers. This was followed by short training sessions, delivered by the supervisors, on how to use the required assessment procedures. During that period, the main goal was to make teachers start using the new system and follow the guidelines set by the Ministry as soon as possible, with little attention paid to enabling teachers to understand the rationale behind this new change in assessment. For example, in the region where this study was conducted, senior teachers attended lectures by the supervisors about how to use the required assessment guidelines. Those senior teachers were then asked to cascade this training to other teachers on return to their schools.

After three years of utilising that introductory training course of CA, the MOE implemented an improved training course. In September 2007, the MOE sent training packages to the educational regions based on an updated SAD. Supervisors and teacher trainers were required to deliver a central training course to senior teachers using those training packages with the intention to cascade training later on in their schools (MOE, 2007a). The training packages required the supervisors and teacher trainers to cover the following themes in the training:

1. Introducing SAD 2007
2. Learning Outcomes
3. Introducing Continuous Assessment
4. Formative & Summative Assessment
5. Day-to-Day Observation
6. Portfolios
7. Projects
8. Group work
9. Generic Tasks for Extensive Reading
10. Self-Assessment
11. Giving Feedback to Learners
12. Rating Scales for CA
13. Formal & Informal Tests
14. Washback effect
15. Formal & Informal Moderation
16. Record-keeping & Reporting

The trainers were given flexibility according to the circumstances in which the training took place, e.g. the amount of time available, the target audience, the size of the training group, the previous assessment experience of trainers and trainees (MOE, 2007a). However, all teachers were required to follow the MOE assessment policy. The overall aim of the training, at that time, was to introduce the updated SAD which was issued in September 2007, explain to teachers the tools of CA and to introduce them to the recording and reporting procedures of CA (MOE, 2007a).

From my observations as a former supervisor of teachers of English who witnessed the system, the training illustrated above often happens at any time of the school year whenever the MOE introduces new amendments or changes in the assessment handbook. There were no independent training courses specifically planned for the purpose of supporting the implementation of CA. The available training was divided into two in-service teacher training courses which were delivered locally in the educational regions with the general aim of upgrading teaching and learning in schools and of supporting the implementation of the new curriculum introduced as part of the Basic and Post-basic educational reforms. These courses included some sessions for supporting the implementation of the assessment system in general (including CA). These courses were usually planned and monitored centrally at Ministry level.

As I illustrated above in this section the assessment handbook is one of the main sources for informing teachers of English about how to implement CA in practice. Nevertheless, since the introduction of CA in September 2004 the assessment handbook has undergone several changes and amendments by the MOE. Based on the information provided in the training document (MOE, 2007a), the MOE produced three assessment handbooks (SAD) from September 2004 to September 2007. The first SAD, which was produced in September 2004, only lasted for one school year and then was changed in the following year. This was due to many complaints from teachers of English as well as supervisors about the difficulty of using the procedures and materials suggested in it (these complaints came through the Supervision Department and I witnessed them as a member of the Department at that time). As a response to this, the MOE produced another revised assessment document with new emphasis on learning outcomes and with simplified record-keeping (MOE, 2007b). This document lasted for two school years (though there were some amendments in some assessment procedures and weightings of some language elements during the two years) and then was replaced by another revised SAD that was introduced in September 2007. After three school years another SAD was issued and introduced in September 2010 (MOE, 2010). However, in the next year 2011/2012 the Ministry issued a new revised assessment handbook and called it 'Student Assessment Handbook' (SAH). The MOE indicated that SAH replaces all previously-issued student assessment documents for English (SAD) and should be implemented from September 2011 (MOE, 2011-2012). However, as I noted in 1.4, the weighting of CA was reduced to 40% in SAH instead of 70% in the previous documents (SAD). 20% was given to the weighting of class tests and 10% was added to end of semester tests (see details in 1.4) (MOE, 2011-2012).

### **1.4.3 Moderation and supervision of CA implementation**

The MOE (MOE, 2011-2012) applies a moderation system for CA. SAH justifies the purpose of this moderation as follows:

The purpose of moderation is to ensure that the criteria for awarding marks are being applied fairly and consistently at different schools across the country. (MOE, 2011-2012, p.52)

The MOE expects formal and informal moderation to be carried out at all grade-levels, including Grade 12. However, it considers Grade 12 as a special case because it concludes with the awarding of the school-leaving Certificate. For this reason, the MOE

requires a particular care and a more formal kind of moderation procedure for it (MOE, 2011-2012).

The ministry requires different methods of formal moderation to be applied, including moderation visits to schools by supervisors of English. The Ministry requests teachers to provide moderators with evidence that the marks that they have awarded for CA are fair and accurate, and in line with national standards. In informal moderation moderators are also asked to focus on developing teachers' awareness of the kinds of evidence which can show that the CA marks which they are awarding are fair and accurate, and in line with national standards (MOE, 2011-2012).

There are two main types of evidence regarding learners' CA required by the official guidelines (MOE, 2011-2012). The first type consists of records made by the teacher during the school year:

- Formal record sheets (i.e. CA recording charts) for all classes.
- Informal notes made about the progress of individual learners, in particular details of their performance in speaking.
- Records of 'texts read' and 'tasks done' as part of independent reading (Generic Tasks).

The second type of evidence consists of examples of work done by individual students (MOE, 2011-2012):

- Writing: individual examples of each of the four main types of writing listed as sub-elements, i.e. interactive, informative, narrative and evaluative. As required by the official guidelines, these pieces of work should be dated and accompanied by marks and also written comments from the teacher.
- Reading: examples of generic tasks done by individual students; responses to classroom reading tasks, including class quizzes.
- Listening: written responses to classroom listening tasks, including quizzes.
- Speaking: audio-recordings of individual students speaking (either 'one-way' or interacting with others).

These records and concrete examples of learners' work are considered by SAH as the basis for discussion and comparison, with the aim of ensuring the accuracy, consistency and fairness of teachers' CA (MOE, 2011-2012). From my observations as a former supervisor, in addition to the moderation committee, educational authorities such as

supervisors of English and members of assessment departments also visit schools to check teachers' implementation of the assessment system including CA.

Supervisors are also required to make supervision visits to teachers to help them regarding CA implementation as well as to evaluate their assessment practices and their teaching generally. These visits involve observation of classes, pre and post-lesson discussion and follow-up of assessment registers and learners' portfolios. By the end of the visit, the supervisor usually checks and discusses with the teacher the assessment registers (e.g. CA recording charts) and samples of learners' portfolios.

### **1.5 Challenges affecting the implementation of CA**

Based on my experience and observations as a former supervisor of English teachers in Dhahira since the introduction of CA in 2004-2005, I focus below on some factors that may emerge as significant in my own study.

The degree to which English teachers implement CA seems to be influenced by a variety of factors, both external from outside school context and internal related to school context and to the classroom environment. The first external factor is the top-down approach of imposing the assessment policies, which are written by senior decision-makers at the MOE level. Top-down planning for CA does not take teachers' views into account. Although English teachers are sometimes encouraged to reflect on their assessment practices during supervisory visits, teachers themselves play only a passive role in contributing directly to the MOE decisions about CA procedures that they must implement in practice. The only opportunity for teachers in this respect is the feedback they provide on a very few occasions on the SADs. Such a top-down approach may mean that teachers' various concerns about implementing CA in their classroom are not accounted for, and this may negatively affect their actual implementation of CA.

In addition, teachers who are the actual implementers of CA do not usually receive direct training about it, as this is usually cascaded through Senior Teachers (see 1.4.2). Such a model of communication may lead to policies and processes being interpreted differently by different people, and may not, therefore, be sufficient for the needs of teachers. Cascading training in this way may mean that the main messages are filtered through personnel at different levels of the system, and so tend to be distorted or clouded by the time they reach the end users.

Another external factor that may affect teachers' actual implementation of CA is the pressure exerted on schools and teachers by educational authorities, including supervisors of English, moderation committees and members of assessment departments to demonstrate high levels of implementation of the new system (see 1.4.3). Such formal visits to teachers made by those officials may exert pressure upon teachers' actual assessment practices and may lead teachers to use the required CA practices without understanding the beliefs underlying them.

Moreover, there is always pressure on teachers from school authorities and parents to maximize their learners' scores in assessments. As the implementation of the new expected assessment practices may affect negatively learners' results, this may lead to negative reactions from parents and school authorities.

In terms of the internal factors, implementing CA in real classrooms is influenced by the following factors: first, the availability of resources such as photocopying and printing facilities, internet access and libraries. Lack of these resources in schools may inhibit the implementation of CA, as teachers are required to use a variety of assessment techniques for which both teachers and learners need access to such resources. In addition, curriculum workload and the number of learners in the classroom also influence teachers' ability to implement the various CA practices.

Moreover, CA implementation requires putting into practice a variety of assessments, tools and procedures, which means that teachers need to know how to implement them in practice and understand the rationale behind using them. Teachers often face difficulties in using some required CA practices because they do not see the purpose behind using them. For example, some teachers do not see the distinction between formative assessment and summative assessment and they only use CA to award marks.

Having briefly outlined here some of the factors that may emerge as significant in my own study as influences on teachers' implementation of CA, based on my experience as a former supervisor of English teachers, further discussion of those factors, as reported in research on the implementation of assessment in other country contexts, is presented in the literature review chapter (2.5).

## 1.6 Teachers of English in Oman

The majority of teachers of English are Omanis and they hold a BA from the University of Leeds or Sultan Qaboos University. The rest of the nationals are qualified from Ajman University in the United Arab Emirates or higher education colleges in Oman. The remainder of English teachers is composed mainly of Egyptians, Indians, Sudanese, and Tunisians. Table 1 below provides information about the distribution of the teachers across regions according to the statistics 2010/2011 of the MOE at the time of this study (MOE, 2010/2011).

**Table 1: Teachers of English in the government schools in Oman**

Region	male	female	total
Muscat	234	608	842
Batinah North	341	754	1095
Batinah South	220	487	707
Dakhiliya	299	540	839
Dhahira	158	301	459
Buraimi	41	95	136
Dhofar	277	336	613
Sharqiya North	167	292	459
Sharqiya South	180	293	473
Wusta	78	54	132
Musandam	22	50	72
Total	2017	3810	5827

This study is concerned with teachers of English who teach in Cycle 2 schools in Dhahira region. Further details and statistics about this group of teachers will follow in Chapter 3 (see 3.5, Table 6).

## 1.7 Rationale for the study

The success of any educational reform depends greatly on what teachers' beliefs are, what teachers think and what they actually do during the process of the implementation (Wedell, 2003). Exploring the implementers' beliefs about the reform and their relationship with their actual practices helps in making sense of the implementation process of the reform. Wedell (2003) points out that for any educational reform, it is important to realize that the view of the implementers about the reform is crucial. In order to understand the implementation of any reform process, an understanding of teachers' beliefs and their relationship with actual practices should be established first. Research on teachers' beliefs and their actual practices helps us understand why teachers

do what they do in their respective classrooms (see sections 2.5 & 2.6 for discussions of research).

Since the introduction of CA in 2004-2005, only one small-scale study has touched this area. This study by Al-Kindi (2009) found that teachers' attitudes towards CA seemed to be influenced by lack of understanding and negative attitude on the part of respondents regarding the implementation of the new CA techniques. However, this study only investigated teachers' attitudes towards CA and its effect on their work without exploring the tension between beliefs and actual practices and the factors that influence the relationship between them. Al-Kindi recommends that further research be conducted to investigate teachers' beliefs about CA in a wider context. This study is partly a response to Al-Kindi's recommendation; it can provide a broader and deeper understanding of teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual implementation of it in the Omani schools.

CA is a major part of the current educational reform in Oman. Since the introduction of CA, the MOE has been investing in the system and has been making efforts to improve its performance. Therefore, this study could provide the MOE with information regarding the state of implementation of this important aspect of the ambitious education reform. The results of the study could inform the training programmes to enhance teachers' expertise in CA implementation. Furthermore, as suggested in section 1.6, English teachers face challenges in implementing CA in their actual practice. Therefore, this study can contribute to understanding the factors that influence the implementation of CA practices and the beliefs that underlie teachers' actual behaviours in their classrooms. Finally, (as the first of its kind in Oman) the findings of the study will contribute new knowledge to the existing knowledge in the TESOL literature about the relationship between teachers' beliefs of language teachers about CA and their actual practices as well as the factors that influence their actual behaviours in real practice.

## **1.8 Thesis outline**

Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework for this study. I review the literature in two main areas: first of all, I define the broad terms of assessment and illustrate the key elements of CA; then I provide a rationale for CA, discuss the implementation of CA in various contexts, and report the challenges that have influenced the implementation of CA in some contexts in the world. The second part of



the review covers the following topics: the definition of beliefs, the importance of beliefs in teaching practice, and teachers' beliefs and assessment practices.

In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed account of the design of the study. First, I present the aims and the research questions. I then provide a detailed overview of the research paradigm, research methods and the design of instruments. I then describe the research participants and the rationale for their involvement. A detailed account of the process of piloting the research instruments is also presented. I then describe the data collection process and the data analysis procedures. I conclude the chapter by commenting on the issues related to the quality of the research and the ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the questionnaires and the follow-up interview data. This chapter covers teachers' beliefs and their CA practices reported in the questionnaire and confirmed in the follow-up interviews. I highlight key issues arising and illustrate them with evidence from the data, including quotations from the follow-up interview data.

In Chapters 5 - 8, I present the findings of the qualitative part of this study. Each of these four chapters presents one teacher's classroom practices and illustrates the extent to which these practices reflect her/his stated beliefs about CA and the CA practices required by the CA guidelines. Each findings chapter also sheds light on the factors and beliefs that had an impact on how this teacher interpreted and implemented CA. In these four chapters, I cite the observation data, which illustrate teachers' actual practices. I also quote extensively from the teachers' comments on their practices in order to provide insight into the thinking behind these practices.

Chapter 9 discusses the major issues suggested by the key findings of the research questions with the aim of relating them to the literature. In this chapter, I first provide brief summaries of the results that related to the four research questions of this study; this is followed by an interpretation of the results focussing on the main themes that emerged from the study, with reference to the literature (reviewed in Chapter 2).

Chapter 10 is the conclusion. In that chapter, I first describe the limitations of the research. Next, I summarize the contributions of the study and discuss the implications from them. I then identify some suggested areas for further work. I conclude with a description of my personal reflection on the research process.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research has recently increased in the field of general education with respect to assessment reforms, teachers' beliefs about them, and how these beliefs influence teachers' assessment practices. In contrast, English-language teachers' (henceforth ELT) implementation of CA reform and how their beliefs and other contextual factors influence the way they interpret and implement such assessment reforms has attracted meagre attention. Thus, little descriptive data about ELT's assessment practices under the CA reform are available, and even less insight has been provided into the beliefs and factors that motivate teachers' actual practices. This is clearly a gaping hole in the research agenda for ELT, which needs significantly more attention and further investigations. My aim in this chapter is to make the case for this study by reviewing the literature in the two areas in which the present study is grounded. I define the broad terms associated with assessment and illustrate the key elements of CA. I then provide a rationale for CA, discuss the implementation of CA in various contexts, and report the challenges that have influenced the implementation of CA in certain global contexts. The second main area of this review focuses on teachers' beliefs. This review addresses the following topics: the definition of beliefs, the importance of beliefs in teaching practices, and the relationship between teachers' beliefs and actual practice.

### **2.1 Definitions of Assessment**

As this section defines "continuous assessment", I start by looking at the broad term "assessment". Contemporary literature differentiates between testing and assessment (Clapham, 2000). For example, Gottlieb (2006) describes testing as a systematic procedure of collecting a sample of a learner's behaviours at one specific point. It measures what a learner has learned up to a given time (Child, 2007). However, assessment, as a broader term, is seen as a comprehensive process of planning, collecting, analysing, reporting, and using information obtained from learners over time. It involves gathering information through the use of quantitative and qualitative inquiries, observations, and many other techniques, such as formal and informal testing (Child, 2007). Assessment also includes the act of interpreting information about a learner's performance, which is collected through multiple assessment techniques or practices. Mentkowski (1998, cited in Genc, 2005) identifies assessment as a set of processes that is

designed to improve, demonstrate, and inquire about learning outcomes. It is more than a tool used by the teacher to evaluate learners at the end of a lesson or unit of study; rather, it is a means through which to gather and integrate data for the purpose of assisting in the teaching and learning process. It also serves a purpose in achieving a sense of accountability, which is accomplished through the use of tools such as tests, observations, interviews, case studies, and specially designed tools and measurement procedures that are used according to the purpose of each assessment (Genc, 2005).

Gipps (1994) distinguishes between two categories of assessment: assessment for learning and assessment of learning. On the one hand, assessment for learning serves the formative purpose in which the first priority in its design and practice is to promote learning. The information gathered through the assessment is used formatively to inform the teaching and learning process which includes providing learners with help and regular feedback to support their strengths and remedy their weaknesses (Hill, 2000; Carlson et al., 2003). On the other hand, assessment of learning serves the purposes of accountability, or of ranking, or of certifying competence (Black et al., 2003). That is, the information gathered through assessment is used summatively for documenting how much learning has occurred at a point in time for the purpose of providing grades and marks (Brindley, 2001). Also, Leung (2014, p.1512) describes assessment as ‘purpose-bound’ and it usually serves two main purposes: formative and summative. The key difference between these two purposes of assessment is in the use made of the evidence and information gathered through the process of assessment (Taras, 2005; Harlen, 2005a; Leung, 2014). Harlen (2006) explains that using the terms ‘formative assessment’ and ‘summative assessment’ can be confusing as it indicates that these are different types of assessment or are related to different approaches to gathering information. Thus, it is for this reason that the terms ‘assessment for learning’ and ‘assessment of learning’ are sometimes used instead. In this study, when summative and formative assessments are used, I refer to the purposes for assessment – so almost identical with assessment of/for learning.

Having explained the key terms of assessment, I next look at the key definitions of CA, which will help to understand its place in the field of assessment and to provide a deeper understanding of the concept.

## **2.2 What is continuous assessment?**

Although CA is widely used in educational contexts, there are many terms used to describe it, including 'class-based assessment', 'teacher-based assessment', 'alternative assessment', 'collaborative assessment', 'authentic assessment'. For example, in the literature from the UK the label 'teacher assessment' or 'classroom assessment' has been used (Group, 2008; Group, 2002). Since this study investigates the Omani CA reform that uses the term 'continuous assessment', I present here some accepted definitions that use the same term. These definitions are applied in a wide range of educational contexts.

Although CA is frequently used, it is rarely defined precisely. The term CA is used to emphasise the ongoing nature of this type of assessment (Nitko, 1995). For example, Le Grange & Reddy (1998) defines CA as an assessment of the learner on an ongoing basis over a period of time, where cumulative judgments of the learner's abilities are made in order to facilitate learning.

Airasian (1991, cited in Alausa, 2003), describes CA as a type of assessment which represents the full range of sources and techniques teachers employ to gather, interpret, and synthesize information about learners. This information is used for understanding the learning process, planning and monitoring instruction and establishing a feasible classroom culture.

Pennyquick (1991, p.145) illustrates the CA system's aims as follows:

CA systems appear to have three main aims: (a) to enhance validity of assessment; (b) to integrate curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; and (c) to serve a broad range of assessment functions, and in particular to emphasise formative functions.

Akyeampong (1997,p.49), for the purpose of his study, synthesises the following definition of CA from the description of it by the West Yorkshire and Lindsey Regional Examination Board in Britain and the Assessment Committee set up at the beginning of CA in Ghana:

CA is primarily a formative evaluative process that enables teachers to develop insights into learning progress or obstacles. Second, it is perceived as a process of assessment that enables judgement about a student's final achievement to reflect a cumulative total of performance over a course of study. Finally, CA is considered to be an assessment process that can provide concrete evidence of students' efforts, progress and achievements and thus show how the student has developed.

In Namibia where CA has been applied since 1990, the MOE employed the following working definition of CA:

When both formal and informal assessments are done on a regular and continuous basis, they are referred to as continuous assessment. Continuous assessment is meant to be integrated with teaching in order to improve learning and to help shape and direct the teaching-learning process. (MOEC, 1999, p.7)

The MOE in Oman describes CA in this way:

Assessment that is conducted - in schools, by teachers - throughout the school year, rather than just at the end. Provides a fairer, more balanced picture of students' attainment. Also allows the inclusion of skills (e.g. speaking) which are difficult (practically) to assess by means of formal testing. Can be used for both Formative and Summative purposes. (MOE, 2011-2012, p.2)

From the definitions above, to varying degrees, then, CA is a set of procedures which include ongoing, multiple assessments by teachers in the classroom. This kind of assessment is likely to be integrated with the curriculum and with the teaching-learning process. The assessment can include informal and formal assessment techniques and can be used for both formative and summative purposes, producing data for decision-making and for understanding and supporting learning. In terms of a working definition for the purpose of the current study, I adopt this synthesis from the previous definitions of CA as it reflects the characteristics of CA system in Oman, which is the focus of this study.

In addition to the illustration above, I provide here some more explanation of the concept CA. Similar to the definitions above, many writers and commentators consider CA as a policy-supported system which makes use of different types of assessments and comprises a variety of assessment tools to gather and interpret information about learners over a period of time (Pennycuick, 2012; Puhl, 1997; Pennycuick, 1991; Carlson et al., 2003; Nitko, 1995). Watkins (2007) explains that the ongoing assessment is usually goal-related and often linked directly to the objectives of national curriculums or national assessment guidelines of the countries that intend to use it. Therefore the national assessment guidelines may state what is to be assessed as a part of CA, how it is to be assessed, and what assessment methods are to be followed to fit with the nature of CA and its characteristics and at the same time complement the curriculum goals (Le Grange and Reddy, 1998; Lisle, 2010). That is, CA may differ from one country to another with regard to the types of assessments that it involves, but it usually keeps the characteristics that underpinned the system such as regularity in conducting assessment and the purposes

of developing learning and gathering data on learners' achievements for both instructional and official purposes. For example, according to Mansell and James (2009), the ongoing teacher assessments currently being conducted in the UK are designed both to assess learner performance in the National Curriculum, in order to clarify the next steps for individual and to inform teaching and to assess learners, in relation to a criterion given by a statement of attainment. Thus, teachers do not only use CA to identify learners' needs in the content of the curriculum, they also use CA to compare learners' performance against specific standards set for their classes.

In addition, Obinna (1997) asserts that CA can involve different types of assessments, including, for example, curriculum-based assessment, criterion-referenced assessment, performance assessment, self-assessment and formative evaluation of learner progress. For example, in Oman and in many other contexts CA involves allowing opportunities for learners to take active part in the process of the assessment on a regular basis. Types of CA aligned to this self-assessment include reflective journals, answering questionnaires and group-based projects (MOE, 2011-2012).

In the following section, I discuss the characteristics of CA based on the above discussion for conceptualizing CA in the context of the current study.

### **2.2.1 Characteristics of CA**

Table 2 below summarizes the main characteristics of CA in the literature according to the views of the researchers and commentators (Puhl, 1997; Bolyard, 2003; Ali and Akube, 1988; 2003; Harlen, 2005a; Nxumalo, 2007; Le Grange and Reddy, 1998; Mansell and James, 2009; Obinna, 1997; Pennycuick, 2012; Pennycuick, 1991; Nitko, 1995).

**Table 2: Characteristics of CA**

<b>Characteristics of CA</b>
Planned and conducted on an ongoing basis by the teacher, during the learning process, so that the learner's development is always monitored and their achievement is continuously tracked
Made up of a variety of assessment methods that can be formal and informal
Provides effective feedback which can be used for multiple assessment purposes (e.g. formative and summative purposes)

Makes use of criterion referencing: learners' performance is assessed against criteria they are informed about
Encourages wider participation and interaction between teachers, learners and parents
Allows learners to reflect on their own performances against assessment criteria
Increases learners' motivation as their awareness that they are continuously assessed intrinsically motivates them to do their best consistently throughout the year
Close to the learner and to the learning process
Directed towards reaching learning outcomes
Integrated in teaching-learning process with feedback to improve the later
Complements forms of assessment, including external examinations

In order to avoid any confusion that may occur here about the concept CA, I compare it with the widely used concept, Teacher-Based Assessment (TBA). TBA is a policy-supported assessment system used worldwide in countries including Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Davison and Leung, 2009, p.401). Davison and Leung (2009, p.395,396) provide the following characteristics of TBA:

- It involves the teacher from the beginning to the end: from planning the assessment programme, through to identifying and/or developing appropriate assessment tasks right through to making the assessment judgments.
- It allows for the collection of a number of samples of student work over a period of time, using a variety of different tasks and activities.
- It can be adapted and modified by the teacher to match the teaching and learning goals of the particular class and students being assessed.
- It is carried out in ordinary classrooms, not in a specialist assessment centre or examination hall.
- It is conducted by the students' own teacher, not a stranger.
- It involves students more actively in the assessment process, especially if self and peer assessment is used in conjunction with teacher assessment.
- It opens up the possibility for teachers to support learner-led enquiry.
- It allows the teacher to give immediate and constructive feedback to students.
- It stimulates continuous evaluation and adjustment of the teaching and learning programme.

- It complements forms of assessment, including external examinations.

In addition, Davison (2007) in her comments about the TBA system in Hong Kong summarizes its characteristics as follows:

- The information gathered is used for both formative and summative purposes;
- integrated into the teaching and learning process;
- the teacher is involved at all stages of the assessment cycle, from planning the assessment, to identifying and/or developing appropriate assessment tasks right through to making the final judgments;
- assessments are conducted in the learners normal classroom and by their own teacher;
- learners are given an active role in the assessment process, particularly through their involvement in self and peer assessment used.

We can see from the above characteristics of TBA and the characteristics of CA (see Table 2) that they are quite similar. It seems there is no difference between the two sets of the basic characteristics. This supports the point made in the discussion in the previous section that although different terms are used to describe this type of assessment in different contexts, the assessments used in these contexts reflect the same basic characteristics and features.

To compare the CA system in Oman (the focus of this study), as described in 1.4, with CA adopted in various contexts worldwide as illustrated here and in the previous section, we can see that it reflects the core features of CA as portrayed in the literature, and so has much in common with that in other contexts. First, the assessment is planned and conducted by the learners' own teacher in their normal classroom by various CA tools, which can be formal and informal. In addition, the information gathered is used for two assessment purposes. Firstly, formative, for the purpose of helping learners to achieve the relevant learning outcomes through regular monitoring of their performance and providing formative feedback at regular basis during the learning process. Secondly, summative, for measuring standards for the purpose of grading and reporting. In addition, the CA in Oman has the design of involving learners in the assessment process and of providing feedback for informing teaching and learning.



### **2.2.2 Formative and summative purposes of CA**

One of the characteristics of CA is that the data gathered through CA can serve multiple purposes (Pennycuick, 2012). In many contexts, CA is used for both formative and summative purposes. For example, in Namibia, Uiseb (2009, p.61) states that "Continuous assessment is utilised for diagnostic and remedial purposes as well as for classification and certification purposes". In Zambia, the purpose of CA is quite similar as it includes both diagnostic and summative purposes: diagnostic "seeks to diagnose the weaknesses and determine approaches that help to redress them" and summative purpose for selection and certification (Kapambwe, 2010, p.105). Comparing CA in Ghana and in England, Pryor & Akwesi (1998, p.264,265) describe CA in England as 'teacher assessment'. It refers to

judgements made about pupils' work by their teachers against formal criteria that are prescribed by someone else..... the other use denotes the informal monitoring of pupils' work as part of the process of teaching and learning, whereby the criteria applied are those of the teachers themselves. The purpose of this is to identify progress and provide formative feedback to pupils on that progress.

Similarly, Hayford (2007, p.76) identifies two main purposes of CA in Ghana:

The formative purposes of continuous assessment encompass: monitoring, diagnosis of difficulties, intervention, and improving teaching. The summative purposes emphasize the use of continuous assessment for grading, reporting and progress, transfer across schools, and contributing to external examination.

From the contexts above, we have seen that CA is used to serve both formative and summative assessment purposes. In addition, in Oman, as stated in the context chapter, CA is used as classroom assessment to inform teaching and learning as well as to report learner's progress and to contribute to external examination.

Having clarified the concept of CA, I now provide an outline of how I understand formative, summative and standardised assessment, so I can refer back to them in the discussion (Chapter 9) when clarifying what form CA takes in the Omani context.

Formative assessment takes place during instruction and learning. It enables teachers to develop ongoing insights about the learning process. This is done through gathering information during the learning process on an ongoing basis from a variety of resources and techniques (e.g. teachers' observations of learners while they are working in the

class, learners' self-assessment). The information gathered in this way has a formative function, which shapes and directs the teaching-learning process.

In contrast, summative assessment takes place at the end of instruction and learning and is usually used for providing feedback for making decisions about grading and certification. This information is then conveyed, as appropriate, to the parents, Ministry and other stakeholders. Summative assessments take different forms, such as small assignments, and tests given at the end of each unit. Summative assessment sometimes is used as an indicator of teachers' teaching capabilities, as their superiors can make judgements about what these teachers can do from their learners' final results.

Standardized assessments usually have consistent conditions, administering, scoring procedures, and interpretations. They are normally administered according to certain rules and specifications to make the testing conditions the same for all test takers. There are many forms of standardized assessment, such as externally administered final exams, standardized interviews, or questionnaires. Standardized tests that are used for the purposes of end-of-course evaluation are considered to be summative assessment. However, standardized tests are not always summative if they are used as a part of the ongoing process of classroom-based formative assessments. Standardized assessment usually claims to be reliable and valid and often provides some type of standard scores which can help interpret how far a learner's scores range from the average.

### **2.3 Rationale for CA as a way of supporting learning**

As one element of this study is to understand English teachers' uses of CA in their classroom, I will provide here a rationale for the role of CA to support learning. Although the main aim of this chapter is to review the literature on CA in language education, the bulk of the literature relevant to this theme comes from general education.

#### **2.3.1 CA and contemporary educational thinking**

As we have seen from the discussion of the characteristics of CA (see 2.2.1), CA has a potential advantage of supporting learning. This section takes into account the discussion above to provide concrete examples of how CA is in line with contemporary educational thinking by making reference to the characteristics of CA.

The first example of how CA contributes to learning is its characteristic of making use of natural classroom interaction. From the perspective of language learning, classroom

interaction is seen as an important resource that could contribute to enhance language learning. As Leung and Mohan (2004, p. 338) suggest, this aspect requires "a systematic examination of the multi-participant nature of discourse and of classroom interaction". CA is assumed to have the advantage of promoting this aspect of classroom interaction because regular observation of classroom discourse would motivate learners to interact, which as a result may increase the scope of communication in the classroom. Also, teachers' regular examination of classroom discourse and their strategies of scaffolding it would also support language learning. As Davison and Leung (2009, p.401), in their comments about English language teacher-based assessment, argue

TBA is assumed to have a number of advantages over external examinations, especially in assessing language, because effective language development requires not just knowledge but skill and application in a wide range of situations and modes of communication.

As feedback is a characteristic of CA, learning can benefit from the regular feedback that CA provides during the process of learning (William, 2010). Rust, (2002 p 142) argues that assessment is much more useful to learning if it provides learners with on-going feedback on their performance. He further asserts, "within a continuous assessment system, we need to ensure that there is plenty of formative feedback at regular intervals". Black and William (1998b) also stress that the core of formative assessment lies in the sequence of two actions: first, the perception by the learner of a gap between a desired goal and his/her present state by means of a teacher's assessment and feedback and, second, action taken by the learner to close that gap in order to attain the desired goal. Brindley (1994), in a study about performance assessment, finds that feedback can be important for learners to obtain useful information about their achievement and progress as they can compare it with the assessment criteria and also with the feedback given for their previous performance. Thus, learners might develop awareness of their own learning when they are regularly informed about their performance and therefore this awareness might help them to identify and think about their own strengths and weakness (Rust, 2002).

A further example is that learning can benefit from the ongoing nature of CA. As Gipps, et al (2000) point out, assessing continuously involves teachers in selecting and reviewing assessments so that they become aware of the process. This awareness could help teachers to integrate assessment and assessment results into instructional practice. This process may also play a fundamental role in diagnosing and remediating areas of

learners' weaknesses as soon as they are discovered as well as informing the teaching process as a whole in its normal context (Kozulin & Garb, 2004; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005, cited in Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009). Some research results also support this view (Gipps et al., 2000; Black et al., 2003; Clarke, 2005b; Clarke, 2005a) as they showed that teachers benefit from the implementation of assessment on an ongoing basis in their classrooms as this helps them to modify instructional plans, provide their learners with regular feedback regarding their strengths and weaknesses.

Assessing continuously all through the learning process also engages teachers in thinking about a variety of sources and methods which serves this purpose (Russell and Airasian, 2012). Thus, learning can benefit from the wide variety of techniques and tools that CA involves which teachers can use to gather, interpret and synthesise information about learners (Airasian, 1991). For example, through portfolio assessment, CA provides concrete examples of learners' application of knowledge. As Gottlieb (1995) puts it, portfolios serve as a guide for students in making ongoing choices of their work and in demonstrating how they reason, create, strategize, and reflect. Research evidence also suggests portfolios as an active CA device to measure learners' effort, achievement, improvement, and self-evaluation (Chen, 2006). Moreover, through performance-based assessment, such as class-based tasks, learners can demonstrate application of their knowledge and skills at any time during the learning process under the direct observation of the teacher (Pierce, 2002; Hall and Burke, 2004). For example, demonstrating a process, or debating during normal classroom. Thus, CA enhances learning through process-oriented assessments, as these provide insight into learner thinking, reasoning, and motivation. They can provide diagnostic information on how well learners use learning strategies and may lead to independent learning when learners are asked to reflect on their learning and set goals to improve it which as a result increases their motivation (Pierce, 2002). So, as Rust (2002) points out, the focus here is not mainly on the actual products or outputs but on the processes which the learners do in order to arrive at these products and outputs.

The ongoing nature of CA also encourages more involvement of parents in the process of learning. Through CA system parents have more access to their children's progress as they can track their learners' progress through the feedback they receive from teachers on a regular basis and teachers, too, can benefit from the comments the parents make on the reports that are sent to them (Shohamy, 2001). Parents also can help their children to

maintain a good selection of materials for their portfolios, and, more importantly, make school visits to talk to teachers about their children's progress in learning (Shohamy, 2001). This seems an important benefit of CA as it provokes the collaboration between teachers and parents, which as a result supports learning. As Shohamy (2001) points out, when parents and practitioners work together at early stages and continue this cooperation all through the process of learning, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.

An additional benefit that CA can provide to learning is its characteristic of focusing on the process of learning rather than the product. According to Rust (2002), focusing on the process of learning rather than the product supports learner-centred approaches to learning. In his review of research about the impact of assessment on learning, he finds that the formative use of CA in which learners are given opportunities to assess themselves and are provided with regular feedback about their performance increases their motivation. Smith (2000) also indicates that learners' ongoing involvement in the different phases of the assessment process, such as collaboratively deciding on assessment targets and on assessment criteria and conducting self- and peer-assessment, enhance their active role in their own learning and they will be likely to develop confidence in their own learning if they are engaged continuously in such assessment strategies ( see also Rust, 2002). Similarly, as Clarke (2005b) also notes, learners' awareness that they are continuously assessed and their knowledge of assessment criteria can help them internalize the concept of autonomous learning and therefore they can make judgments about their own learning and assume active roles in the assessment process, which at the same time increases their motivation. This is evident in a study by Al-Jardani (2006) which investigated the effectiveness of self-assessment in teaching English to young learners in Oman. The results indicate that the ongoing involvement of learners in self-assessment increased learners' awareness of their learning and provoked their motivation in taking part in the assessment process.

Consequently, as CA focuses on the process of learning on an ongoing basis, it may help in reducing the anxiety, which is normally associated with assessment. As McNamara (2000) points out, since CA is carried out on a regular basis during normal teaching, learners will not have the feeling that they are under pressure of formal testing. Moreover, the benefit of CA in reducing anxiety can be also an advantage for assessing the speaking skill. Writers and commentators regard CA framework as the most suitable

arena in the assessment of speaking skill (Clarke and Gipps, 2000; Andrews et al., 2002). For example, Mattos (2000) concludes as a result of her research that assessing the oral skills during the normal classroom teaching is more beneficial for learning and leads to a successful judgment of the speaking skill. She argues against the assessment of speaking by the means of testing: "students are usually afraid of taking risks in front of the examiner, and feel frustrated with their ability to produce the language they are learning" (Mattos, 2000, p.343). Thus, she suggests that by using CA procedures, learners may gain confidence in working in groups, and also have more time to prepare for their oral tasks. Another conclusion from Mattos's research is that learners tend to learn from each other and help peers when facing problems during the oral task. Consequently, learners would have the potential of developing confidence in speaking as the anxiety of being formally assessed fades away and replaced by a supporting teaching and learning environment.

Having here reviewed the literature on how CA is beneficial for learning, the next section discusses some counter arguments against it.

### **2.3.2 Shortcomings of CA**

Although it has been widely claimed that CA is beneficial for learning, there are also some counter arguments against it. For example, the ARG (2002) notes, based on evidence from reports of school inspections in the UK, that there is little empirical evidence that the use of CA does actually support learning. Black and Wiliam (1998a) in their review of the literature on teacher assessment reports similar evidence about the value of CA on learning in many other countries. In the UK, there is currently an ongoing debate in the field of education concerning the use of CA. In the debate CA has been criticised for issues such as lack of reliability, its corrosive effect on ethics in teaching and the likelihood of spreading hypocrisy (Copeland, 2013). For example, Michael Gove, the UK Secretary of Education, criticised CA and claims that it is inappropriate for high stakes national assessment. He argues that CA is very subjective and unreliable and only useful for very low stakes assessment. With regard to lack of reliability, CA has been accused of not providing accurate judgment of the learner's actual performance. That is, the grades awarded to learners based on CA were thought of as not reliable as the originality of the learner's work cannot be assured (Copeland, 2013). There is also an argument that CA favours middle-class children with educated parents who can support their homework/coursework (Copeland, 2013).

Also, in the UK, there has been an ongoing debate among writers in education assessment and commentators of whether CA can serve all assessment functions. For example, Broadfoot et al. (2002) question the feasibility of applying a parallel assessment system which involves both summative function and formative function. Broadfoot et al. (2002) claim that the integration of the diagnostic, formative, and summative functions of CA is unlikely to achieve its purpose probably due to the dominance of its evaluative function. Also, in a review of research on classroom assessment and its impact, the Assessment Reform Group (1999) concludes that formative assessment, when carried out as a part of CA, often means no more than that assessment is carried out frequently. The ARG notes that CA mainly takes summative form rather than the formative purpose, in that it generally involves only marking and feeding back grades or marks to learners (see also Teasdale and Leung, 2000). Similarly, Calfee and Masuda (1997) in their literature review about CA in the USA arrive at a conclusion that CA tends to take more summative forms rather than improving learning. Calfee and Masuda argue that teachers do not appear to be driven by a desire to understand learning; they seem to focus on the outputs of learning but not on the process of what the learners do in order to arrive at these outputs. Researchers and commentators attribute this tendency of CA to value summative purposes more than formative purposes to some factors associated with the nature of CA itself. Broadfoot et al. (2002), for example, explain that since CA involves assessing learners regularly by frequent exercises and assessment tools, the emphasis is likely to be placed on marks and on the procedures for processing them to fill in the attainment records. According to Broadfoot et al, this pressure on teachers to give regular assessment exercises might reduce the time given for supporting learning. James (1998) also commenting on a similar situation, links teachers' overvaluing of the summative function to the requirement for them to report the CA score in a form of marks. Literature has shown that feedback in the form of marks and grades is not beneficial to learning, particularly slow learners (see for example, Black and William, 2006; Clark, 2001). For example, Clark (2001) states that giving feedback in a form of grades and marks for learners' work may not obtain useful information to the learners about their achievement and progress and thus this may not help them think about their own strengths and weakness.

Another criticism for CA is that it does not appear to favour slow learners. Broadfoot et al. (2002) claim that slow learners may become discouraged in an assessment system that involves assessing learners regularly by frequent exercises and assessment tools.

Broadfoot et al. (2002) explain that since slow learners have to regularly deal with assessments above their ability, this may affect their motivation towards learning in general. Slow learners will struggle in such situation as they have less ability to cope and also due to the lack of time less attention might be given to them by teachers (Broadfoot et al., 2002) (See Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Harlen, 2005b; Black and Wiliam, 2006). Moreover, assessments that require learners to express opinions or show their learning in front of others may put more demands on slow learners or learners with limited speaking skills (Leung and Mohan, 2004). Therefore, even when language learners have the ability to understand the feedback given by the teachers, they may not be able to get the message behind that feedback (Leung and Mohan, 2004).

There is another argument that CA does not seem to work in large classes (Lisle, 2010; Hayford, 2006; Pollard and Collins, 2005). The larger classes affect the quality of CA in the classroom (Lisle, 2010). CA is supposedly meant to deal with individual learners on a regular basis, assess different aspects of their work and provide feedback to every individual learner in the classroom. However, Hayford (2007) found in his study about CA in Ghana that those strategies of CA were not evident in larger classes. Pollard and Collins (2005) have noted that even if teachers wish to provide attention to all learners in their classrooms, there is evidence that, in the context of large class-sizes and the requirements of many assessment procedures, it is difficult for teachers to achieve. In addition, in their studies about CA both Asamoah-Gyimah (2002) and Angbing (2001) found that teachers' efforts to use CA to support learning were unsuccessful in larger classes.

As I discussed earlier in the previous section, CA may be considered beneficial since it makes use of criterion referencing: learners' progress is assessed against criteria known by them. Learners' motivation towards learning may be increased if they have an idea about what they are going to learn, and consequently what they are going to be assessed on (Airasian, 2005; Clarke, 2005b; Obinna, 1997). However, if the criteria of CA is not clearly conveyed to learners about what skills and knowledge they should demonstrate when doing their work, less attention among learners of assessing their own learning may occur (Stobart and Gardner, 2006). Stobart and Gardner (2006) argue that in a criterion-referenced system, in which the learner must meet every statement at a level to gain that level, the threat to the scope for learning is that the standard may become too detailed and difficult for learners to achieve. Another threat, according to Stobart and Gardner (2006),



is the teacher's ability to explain the criteria and make the learners aware of them. They claim that ambiguity in the assessment criteria may inhibit learners' understanding about the process of assessment and affect their involvement in it. According to Harris and Bell (1990) and O'Malley and Pierce (1996) such problems occur where the learner has very little knowledge about the criteria in which the assessment has been based on. This may lead to learners facing difficulties in producing work according to their own internal criteria, which on many occasions contradicts the intended criteria.

## **2.4 Implementation of CA**

There is evidence from a wide range of countries of the increasing role of CA. This section discusses the process of CA implementation in various education systems in the world (both ELT and general education) and compares it to the Omani CA system. This will help in providing a deeper understanding of CA implementation and identifying any potential problems associated with it. In this section, I first discuss the nature of innovation in general as being crucial in the implementation process of any educational innovation; I then discuss the implementation of CA in various contexts. Following this, I present the challenges to teachers identified by different studies that have investigated the implementation of CA or some of its components in many contexts worldwide.

### **2.4.1 The nature of innovation**

Successful implementation of any innovation can depend on the nature of the innovation itself (Fullan, 2013; Rogers, 2010). The nature of the innovation can be viewed in terms of its originality, complexity, and clarity (Fullan, 2013; Rogers, 2010). The discussion in this section is focused around these three concepts.

Originality is referred in the literature to the extent to which the new practices brought by the innovation can be so novel that adopters do not understand it (Stoller, 2009). Wedell (2008, p.18) commenting on the introduction of ELT curriculum in some EFL contexts questioned the feasibility of achieving the curriculum outcomes when the “language, ideas and approaches (were) imported from English-speaking western, cultural settings.” Also, Holliday (2001) warns that when the new approaches and ideas are not introduced in terms that suit the teachers’ “cultural continuity”, a conflict could occur in the implementation process. Fullan (2013) explains that this conflict may lead to teachers using the new materials without making changes in their teaching approach or using the

materials and altering their teaching behaviours without understanding the beliefs underlying the change. Also, the Assessment Reform Group (2008) in a review of recent initiatives and developments in assessment in the UK concludes that successful implementation of innovation cannot rely on the assumption that what works in one culture will work in another. The ARG notes that important issues need to be taken into consideration when planning the scaling up of innovations in assessment practice: the context, the nature of the innovation and its impact in relation to other initiatives. Wedell (2003) advises curriculum planners of the need to decide on the extent of cultural change that the practices implied by the suggested change which will be appropriate for teachers.

The CA system in Oman originally came from the UK context, where the teaching and learning settings are to some extent different from the settings in the Omani context. For example, in primary schools in the UK, the classroom settings and the teaching approaches used by teachers appear to facilitate the implementation of CA: i.e. small class sizes, learner-centred approaches, sufficient time for teachers to adopt many different strategies and forms of CA, task-based learning (DCSF et al., 2008). For example, in the task-based learning settings teachers can easily observe the learners while doing the tasks. They also have enough time after their lessons to review the learners' work regularly. Although the educational reform in Oman has dealt with some visible and structural aspects of change (see 1.3), many aspects of teaching and learning are still not suited to implementing the imported innovation of CA. This is also true in many other educational systems worldwide, as I illustrate in Table 3 below; different studies reported some mismatches between the intended assessment innovations and the classroom expectations. Moreover, it seems that the innovation is unlikely to gain the full backing of the educational community because of its inherent weaknesses. As I illustrated earlier in this chapter (see 2.3.2), there are some counter arguments raised against CA in some developed contexts such as the UK and the USA due to some theoretical and practical problems associated with its nature (see Group, 2008). Also in Oman there was an opposition against CA, as illustrated in 1.3, where teachers attributed the poor behaviour of learners to problems associated with CA. That is, if the innovation has been facing problems in its original places, such problems may place more demands when the innovation is exported to other contexts in the world.

With regard to complexity of the innovation, Stoller (2009) states that implementation of innovation depends largely on implementers' perceptions whether the innovation is

neither completely simple nor too complex. Complex changes brought by the innovation are more difficult to be successfully implemented (Kiely, 2012). Change is seen as affecting all stakeholders in the educational contexts with regard to the tasks they are undertaking as a result of change, their understanding of these tasks and the resources they draw on in undertaking these tasks (Kiely, 2008; Wedell, 2008). Kiely (2012) comments on the common phenomenon where teachers on training courses commit to the new practices introduced but then fail to implement these practices in their workplace; he argues that teachers' failure in implementation is due to the fact that they can only do what is possible for them. As the classroom practice is shaped by many factors, new approaches introduced in isolation will not seem possible to be implemented by teachers (Kiely, 2012). Also, the Assessment Reform Group (2008, p.4) reviewed the recent initiatives and developments in assessment in all four countries of the UK: England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland; as a result of the assessment innovation teachers are required to integrate assessment into their teaching in order to identify where their learners are in their learning and the steps they need to take for improvement and progress. However, although this was a persuasive rationale for change for teachers, the fact remains that changes in assessment practice have been notoriously difficult to sustain by them. In their conclusion, they state, "innovation may fail in the face of workload issues or in simply not being a convincing enough change for teachers to adopt". Also, Davison and Leung (2009, p.394) comment on the implementation of teacher-based assessment that

English language teachers are increasingly being called on to plan and implement their own assessment instruments and procedures to monitor and evaluate student progress in their classrooms, and new curriculum documents and professional teaching standards increasingly demand English language teachers be knowledgeable and skilled in TBA.

In 2.6 below, I provide more specific examples of studies of teachers' responses to the introduction of assessment innovations in different educational contexts. In these studies researchers reported that teachers generally could not make sense of the innovation because of its complex structure and very theoretical orientation.

Another factor, which also has an impact on the implementation of the innovation process, is the clarity of the innovation to the implementers. Stoller (2009) argues that the implementers need to be clear about what exactly the innovation involves and how to put it into practice. Fullan (2013, p.89) warns that

lack of clarity, diffuse goals and unspecified means of implementation-represent a major problem at the implementation stage; teachers and others find that change is simply not very clear as to what it means in practice.

Unclear and unspecified changes among the people most directly affected can lead to the problem of superficial implementation (Fullan, 2013; Wedell, 2009). Moreover, as the Assessment Reform Group (2008) finds from their review of assessment projects in the UK, telling teachers about innovation through policy documents or professional development resources without involving them practically in the process of implementation can lead to less commitment by them to adopt the changes. They conclude that lack of a fundamental understanding of the purposes of innovation and lack of clarity about its techniques may lead to confusion and ultimately to rejection of the techniques.

Moreover, Daugherty (1996, p.144) comments on the lack of clarity of teacher assessment in the UK:

in the absence of clarity about purposes and procedures, teachers were being overburdened and becoming increasingly disillusioned about the part they were expected to play in the national assessment system.

In addition, Daugherty (1996, p.144) further adds

Failure to clarify the nature of teacher assessment had not only contributed to a crisis for national assessment policy, it had left many teachers less positive than they had been initially about the potential value of being fully involved in making judgements about their own pupils' attainments.

Later in this chapter (see 2.6), I provide specific examples of studies on how teachers in many ELT contexts showed incomplete understanding of the innovation they were asked to implement and that this misunderstanding resulted in negative perceptions of the innovation.

In this section, I discussed how the nature of innovation could influence its successful implementation in terms of its originality, complexity, and clarity. I now use the discussion above to critique the CA innovations introduced into different educational systems including the Omani context and illustrate how its nature could influence the implementation process.

### **2.4.2 A critique of recent CA reforms**

Before I critique the CA reforms, I first illustrate the reasons for the shift to a CA system in many educational contexts. A sudden shift to the CA system has been a very common phenomenon in many educational contexts due to concerns about the limitations of summative assessment as an adequate measure of what learners know (Puhl, 1997; Adebowale and Alao, 2008). Also, in many countries, the shift to outcomes-based education required new forms of assessment to support it, as in Trinidad and Tobago (Lisle, 2010). In some developing countries, such as Zambia, Ghana, and Nigeria, the objectives of the CA implementations are mainly twofold: firstly, to promote the use of formative assessment so as to improve the quality of learning and teaching and secondly, to establish a regular system of managing cumulative learners' performance marks for purposes of using them in combination with final examination marks for selection and certification (Kapambwe, 2010; Plessis et al., 2003; Hayford, 2007). Also in some developed countries (e.g. the UK, Australia, the USA) CA systems have been in operation for decades for the purpose of serving a broader range of assessment functions and in particular to emphasis formative functions (Mansell and James, 2009; Group, 1999). As I illustrated in the Chapter 1, Oman had similar reasons for the shift to the CA system.

### **2.4.3 Preparations for introducing CA**

One possible critique of the CA innovations is the fact that such reforms around the world are introduced without consideration of teachers' existing beliefs, and of the contextual factors that might inhibit the implementation process. Change to the CA system was therefore carried out without sufficient preparation, and without much consideration of dilemmas and obstacles that might evolve during the actual implementation (Al-Kindy, 2009; Kapambwe, 2010). For example, in Zambia, Oman and Namibia, some documents, such as CA teacher's guides, manuals, assessment schemes, and exemplar tasks were quickly introduced for teachers to help them to implement the new approaches (Kapambwe, 2010; Al-Kindy, 2009). Also, teachers (and in some contexts supervisors) were simply given briefing sessions about the CA systems, and in these sessions they were told to follow the CA guidelines (MOEC, 1999; Chan, 2008; Kapambwe, 2010; Nxumalo, 2007). In other countries like Taiwan and Malawi, short in-service training sessions were also conducted aimed at equipping teachers to implement CA methods (Bolyard, 2003; Chan, 2008). In the UK, a cascade model has been widely

used to inform teachers about teacher assessment implementation. This model initially involved a small number of advisory staff in local authorities to be trained in the matters to be disseminated. Those trained then train others cascading down from the top of an innovation fountain until it ripples across the whole community of teachers (Group, 2008). However, according to the Assessment Reform Group (2008), cascading training through this way fades in the large-scale community of teachers. They claim that this model had only limited success due to the fact that learning process for the first person was not same as for the last one.

Comparing it with the above contexts, the system in Oman provides training during the process of implementation of CA; senior teachers attended the main training, which they cascaded later on in their schools (see 1.4.2). Thus, in these arrangements for CA there seems no consideration of teachers' existing beliefs, and of the contextual factors that may inhibit the implementation process (Wedell, 2005). The decision to introduce the new CA was taken by the top levels in these contexts with little attention to enabling teachers to understand the rationale behind this new system. By trying to explain how to implement CA innovation for the teachers in these contexts, policy makers may have felt that they were adopting an empirical rational strategy. This strategy is based on an assumption that implementers are logical beings and that the innovation will be implemented once proof has been provided to show that it will benefit those whom it affects (Markee, 1997). However, what happened on the ground indicates that the strategy adopted by policy makers in practice to introduce this innovation was in fact a power coercive strategy (Markee, 1997). This strategy imposes forms of policies to force implementers to change and act in certain ways (Markee, 1997).

#### **2.4.4 The challenge of planning for CA**

If the preparations are inadequate, the actual classroom implementation of CA is not a straightforward job for teachers. CA implementation requires teachers to follow many different procedures and to adopt many strategies. Le Grange & Reddy (1998), in their guidelines to CA implementation in South Africa, explain that two planning procedures for CA need to be undertaken by teachers: firstly, team planning in which teachers in one grade or subject area can focus on developing the learning outcomes suited to their learning area. For example, language teachers may focus on assessing oral presentations. This type of planning is also used in some countries in Africa such as Namibia and Ghana (MOEC, 1999; Hayford, 2006). In Oman the process of team planning for CA is

quite similar to those countries. Senior teachers hold meetings with all the English teachers at the school. They, together, discuss the information and guidelines for implementing CA (MOE, 2011-2012). The second type of planning procedure is individual teacher planning. As stated by MOE in Namibia, CA is required to be integrated into teachers' lesson plans in order to provide the necessary links between assessments and the syllabus' objectives and competencies (MOEC, 1999). Le Grange & Reddy (1998) also suggest that when teachers plan their lessons and activities, their plans are expected to include the outcomes that they intend to achieve. These outcomes are expected to be learner-oriented, clear, and observable, and describe what a learner is expected to demonstrate at the end of learning process. Grange & Reddy add that teachers are also expected to decide what method of assessment is the most appropriate to determine whether learners have achieved the outcomes.

In Oman, teachers are often asked to follow similar planning procedures for CA implementation. However, teachers in Oman are required to do other duties: at the start of the school year, teachers first familiarize themselves especially with the relevant CA materials and strategies for conducting CA for each grade they teach. Second, they explain to learners about: how CA will be conducted and the criteria for awarding marks (i.e. rating scales) (MOE, 2011-2012). The above examples about planning for CA indicate that the adoption of this assessment system required teachers to adopt new assumptions about assessing language learning, new teachers' roles, and new learners' roles. Thus, the challenge for teachers is how to put them into practice and overall to understand the rationale behind using these new techniques.

#### **2.4.5 The challenge of adopting CA tools and procedures**

Similar to the case of planning for CA, the CA system also requires teachers to adopt many different procedures and use different forms of assessment techniques. According to Le Grange & Reddy (1998) CA involves three assessors: teacher, self and peers. The probable challenge for teachers is perhaps to accept that learners and their peers are legitimate assessors, contrary to all their previous practice and beliefs. Sharing this responsibility with their learners might be seen by many teachers as a threat to their role as teachers, and might be interpreted by many teachers as not fulfilling their responsibility towards their learners.

CA also involves a wide variety of techniques, which can be formal and informal. In Namibia, for example, informal assessment includes questioning a learner, observing a learner work, reviewing a learner's homework, and providing feedback to learners during classroom activities, whereas formal assessment includes short tests, quizzes, oral examinations, performance assessment tasks, examinations, projects and portfolios (MOEC, 1999). For the formal methods, the teachers assess learners using assessment grids (detailed criteria) and allocate percentages or symbols or make remarks and comments about the learner's fulfilment of the criteria (Le Grange and Reddy, 1998). However, these techniques are applied with differing levels of formality in different contexts. For example, the portfolio is considered as an informal CA strategy in Taiwan. As described by Chan (2008), teachers are expected to consider the learners' portfolios to provide a continuous record of language development, reflect the learning processes, demonstrate learners' real progress, give teachers and learners opportunities to set goals and provide an opportunity for parents, learners, and other teachers to view concrete results of learning. In contrast, in many other contexts the portfolio is part of the formal assessment in which it is supposed to be used by teachers for grading of learners' progress and awarding marks.

As I illustrated in the context chapter, the Omani system also expects teachers to use a variety of strategies and tools for CA implementation with their learners, which may place demands on teachers to adopt in real practice (see 1.5). It is not the matter of a large number of approaches used to assess learners, but what really matters is teachers' abilities and readiness to put them into practice (Akyeampong, 1997). Akyeampong, for example, questions the use of observations to assess learners during normal learning activities as they will require a structure for focusing observations and interpreting them, which can be beyond teachers' abilities.

#### **2.4.6 The challenge of record keeping**

Record keeping is one of the important CA requirements that teachers need to meet on a regular basis. This could add to the challenges that teachers might encounter during the actual implementation of CA, which could also affect their attitude towards using it purposefully.

The purpose of record keeping in CA is to provide formal and informal records of learners' performance over a period of time and this data will be used for informing



teaching and learning and for feeding into the cumulative records to show the overall grades of each learner in the classroom by the end of the semester (Le Grange and Reddy, 1998). Lisle (2010), comparing between CA practices in Trinidad and Tobago and in other developing countries, explains that the teachers in Trinidad and Tobago, like in many developing countries, are required to use a variety of records such as cumulative record cards, learner assessment products, diagnostic and remedial records, teacher informal records and other records of which aspects of learning still need to be developed further and which aspects have already been developed. Also, Le Grange & Reddy (1998), in their guidelines for CA implementation in South Africa, suggest using different grids that reflect the various learning outcomes that teachers expect the learners to achieve. Teachers are required to record their assessment of various outcomes and classroom activities on a daily basis. Also, they suggest discussing the assessment ratings with the learners' and including the learners' input in assessment records. This process of record keeping has particular relevance for Oman CA as teachers mainly use similar records such as cumulative record sheets and diagnostic and remedial records. However, moderation of record charts, as explained in the context part (see section 1.4.3), seems to be another requirement that teachers in Oman need to consider. The formal moderation committee (the members of this committee are supervisors from all subjects including two supervisors of English) visits teachers at the end of each semester for inspection of the CA marks awarded by them before the marks are to be finalized and submitted. During this visit, each teacher is required to present evidence of learners' work (see 1.4.3).

As we have seen from the discussion above, the implementation of the above strategies requires teachers to develop certain skills and also have a clear understanding of the different concepts and uses of CA in a way that makes them able to use them in their actual practice. However, it is likely that even after the short training sessions (2.5.3) many teachers still did not have a clear understanding of what was expected of them in their new role of using CA. Thus, these teachers may not have had the necessary skills to carry out their new roles and, most importantly, they may not have understood the rationale behind using them. Also, even where they did understand them, some of those intended uses and strategies of CA may contradict teachers' own beliefs about using assessment with their learners and the actual implementation of them could be also challenged by many contextual factors in the real situation.

Having here critiqued the CA innovations introduced into different educational systems including the Omani context and illustrated how its nature could influence the implementation process. The next section reports the challenges emerged in practice of CA implementation and which identified by different studies worldwide.

## **2.5 Challenges encountered in the implementation of CA**

This section focuses on the challenges which emerged in practice during the implementation of CA reforms in different educational contexts around the world, and which have been documented in the literature: Table 3 presents the studies which have investigated the implementation of CA and which identified these challenges.

It is clear from Table 3 that teachers have encountered many problems stemming from a variety of factors affected by the process of CA implementation. As Table 3 shows, there are four main recurrent challenges across a wide range of geographical contexts: teachers' limited skills in using different types and methods of CA, heavy workloads, inadequate training and support to teachers and teachers' possible lack of understanding of CA. In the context chapter I explained, based on my experience, that there are some indications of similar challenges in the Omani context (see section 1.5). This is also clear from the research by both Al-Kindi and Al-Balushi (see Table 3 below), though both are small-scale studies and Al-Balushi's study only investigated English teachers' perceptions of workload in general.

As Table 3 illustrates, the types of the challenges identified by the studies indicate that CA implementation has been influenced by factors related to the nature of CA innovations in terms of their originality, complexity, and clarity (illustrated in 2.4.1). These types of factors, as Table 3 shows, imply that the introduction of any new assessment innovation within any educational system involves a significant impact on teachers' beliefs and their perceptions of their new role in implementing the innovation. In addition, teachers seem to interpret, modify, and react to such innovations according to their beliefs and contextual factors in their workplace. The learning point is that innovations in CA seem to be associated with many factors that influence the implementation of such innovations, including teachers' beliefs about it.

The studies presented in Table 3 were valuable in providing insight into the implementation of CA and the different factors that affect it. Yet, more exploration is

needed in this area. First, in terms of the focus, the studies in Table 3 mainly focused on evaluating the process of CA implementation (e.g. Adebowale and Alao, 2008; Kapambwe, 2010; Uiseb, 2009); thus, more critical consideration is needed on the cognitive factors and their effect on the implementation of CA. Second, in terms of the context, more research is required to represent the large majority of language teaching settings across the world as much of the research has been conducted in African countries in non-language teaching contexts. Third, much of the research in Table 3 on CA has focused only on self-reported beliefs and practices explored through questionnaires and interviews (e.g. Chan, 2008; Dowrich, 2008), with only a few small-scale studies looked at teachers' actual practice (e.g. Al-Kindy, 2009). Therefore, more research is needed to investigate the actual implementation of CA and relate it to teachers' stated beliefs about CA. Thus, this study aimed to investigate in depth the relationship between teachers' beliefs about and their actual practice of CA in order to determine the real factors that affect the implementation of CA in Oman.

This part of the literature review has focussed mainly on those aspects of CA relevant to this study. It showed that there is a growing body of research related to CA implementation with evidence of a wide range of factors, which have an impact on the adoption, and implementation of CA. Teachers' beliefs are also considered in the literature as an important factor which could influence the implementation of any educational innovation. The next part of this literature review will consider the role of teachers' beliefs as being a crucial factor in the implementation process of CA.

**Table 3: Factors affecting teachers' implementation of CA**

Source	Context	Methods	Challenges
(Kapambwe, 2010)	Zambia A study evaluated the implementation of CA system at high school (Grades 8-12) and Lower primary (Grade 1-4) from 2006 to 2010	Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sudden change to CA system</li> <li>- Large class sizes</li> <li>- Workload of marking and keeping records of the progress of all learners.</li> <li>- Time consuming remedial activities for weak learners</li> <li>- Inadequate teaching and learning materials</li> <li>- Lack of collaboration between teachers</li> <li>- Inadequate monitoring conducted by the district officials</li> </ul>
(Chan, 2008)	Taiwan 520 EFL teachers	Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Insufficient training for teachers</li> <li>- Work overload</li> <li>- Large class size</li> <li>- Time consuming assessment activities</li> </ul>
(Hayford, 2007)	Ghana 124 English and mathematics primary and junior secondary teachers	Questionnaires (107 teachers), semi-structured interviews and classroom observations (17 teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficulties in measuring the learners' affective attributes</li> <li>- Overload of learners' written tasks</li> <li>- Teachers' low level of commitment</li> <li>- Large classes</li> <li>- Teachers' lack of understanding of the concept CA</li> </ul>
(Uiseb, 2009)	Namibia 120 teachers from 10 primary schools	Open-ended questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of understanding among teachers of the rationale behind CA approaches.</li> <li>- Misuse of CA from the side of teachers</li> <li>- Confusion between summative and formative assessment</li> <li>- Lack of regular follow-up training</li> <li>- Lack of supervisory visits to teachers</li> <li>- Overload of entering CA records</li> <li>- Overcrowded classrooms</li> </ul>
(Al-Kindy, 2009)	Oman 52 teachers of English	Structured questionnaires (50 teachers), semi-structured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sudden change to CA</li> <li>- Lack of training</li> </ul>

		observation (2 teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher-centeredness in teaching</li> <li>- Limited opportunities for self-assessment and peer assessment</li> <li>- doubts about how CA will contribute to learners' achievement</li> <li>- Teachers have doubts about their own role in the classroom in the new system</li> </ul>
(Al-Balushi, 2009)	Oman 72 senior teachers of English and 114 teachers of English	Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extra Workload of correcting and giving feedback on learners' work</li> <li>- Workload of designing remedial plans for weak learners, and evaluating their progress</li> </ul>
(Qassim, 2008)	Qatar 507 teachers of different subjects from 18 secondary schools	Questionnaires (490 teachers), focus group interviews (17 teachers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Different assessment forms restricts teachers' capability to introduce new assessment procedures</li> <li>- Difficulty to comply with assessment requirements</li> <li>- Curriculum workload</li> <li>- Crowded classrooms</li> </ul>
(Guthrie, 2005)	The UK 1 head teacher and 15 teachers	Questionnaires, semi structured interviews, non-participant Observation, documentary Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Confusion between summative and formative assessment</li> <li>- Teacher-centred view of formative assessment which has resulted in misuse of formative assessment</li> <li>- Rigid use of the same formative assessment approaches</li> <li>- Unsupportive training for teachers</li> </ul>
(Shim, 2008)	Korea 86 Korean teachers of English from 68 primary schools	Questionnaires, interviews for 16 teachers, assessment materials analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents' subjectivity</li> <li>- Large classes</li> <li>- Teaching load</li> <li>- Overload of assessment activities</li> </ul>
(Adebowale and Alao, 2008)	Nigeria 100 primary school teachers	Questionnaires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inadequate conceptualization of CA</li> <li>- Extra workload of record keeping</li> </ul>
(Dowrich, 2008)	Trinidad and Tobago 7 teachers	Semi-structured interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Inadequate training</li> <li>- Lack of commitment by trainers</li> <li>- Lack of collaboration among teachers to share knowledge about CA</li> <li>- Resistant to change among some teachers in the school</li> <li>- Lack of support and mentoring from principles and supervisors</li> <li>- lack of support from parents</li> <li>- shortage of resources</li> </ul>

## **2.6 Teachers' beliefs**

Research in language education has given considerable emphasis to the relationships between teachers' beliefs and practices. Many researchers have undertaken research on teachers' beliefs about various aspects of the curriculum and how these beliefs influence teachers' practice. Different reviews of such research (Fang, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Zheng, 2009; Basturkmen, 2012) conclude that there is a strong relationship between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practice. Understanding teachers' beliefs about CA should thus be regarded as an important element in studying CA actual practice. The first part of this chapter provided in-depth discussion around CA and shed light on teachers' practices of CA, highlighting the challenges that often affect the implementation of CA. In the remainder of this chapter I therefore discuss various issues related to teachers' beliefs and their relationship with their actual practice of assessment. I also illustrate the importance of teachers' beliefs and their influence on their assessment practice by describing some empirical studies of the issue. Finally, I argue for the need to explore the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their CA practice.

### **2.6.1 Beliefs defined**

S. Borg (2003, p. 81) uses the term "teacher cognition" to refer to "what teachers know, believe, and think" and he describes these constructs as the "unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching". Beliefs, as one of these constructs, are described as

the information, attitudes, values, expectations, theories, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers build up over time and bring with them into the classroom. (Richards, 1998, p.66)

Thomas & Pederson (2003, p.319), in their definition of beliefs, add to the above "personal convictions, philosophies, tenets, or opinions about teaching and learning." According to Bauch (1984) these beliefs are transformed into attitudes, which in turn influence intentions, with intentions becoming the bases for decisions that lead to action. Johnson (1994) points out that beliefs contain a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioural component and, therefore, act as influences on what one knows, feels, and does. According to M. Borg (2001, p.186) teachers' beliefs refer to teachers' pedagogical beliefs or those beliefs of relevance to an individual's teaching. She describes beliefs in this way:

a belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour.

This definition will be used for the purposes of the current study.

### **2.6.2 The importance of beliefs in teaching practice**

Teachers' beliefs are related to personal assumptions that influence teachers' curriculum decision-making and teaching approaches (Borg, 1998; Pajares, 1992; Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). Researchers, in both mainstream and language education, believe that teachers have beliefs about many different areas related to teaching and learning such as: beliefs about learners and learning; about teaching; about subject; about learning to teach; about self and about the role of teaching (Fang, 1996; Johnson, 1994; Pajares, 1992; Richards, 1998; Borg, 2003; Calderhead, 1996). Teachers' instructional decisions are often influenced by such beliefs (Borg, 1999b) and these beliefs, in turn, largely influence teachers' choices and practice, such as setting teaching objectives, planning lessons, designing tasks and activities, and assessing learner performance (Ríos, 1996). Therefore, as teachers' beliefs have such influence on teachers' instructional decisions, studying teachers' beliefs about assessment requires also considering their beliefs about language learning more generally.

In her research about pre-service teacher beliefs, Kagan (1992) identifies several features of teachers' beliefs: they are stable and hard to change, and reflect the type of behaviour a teacher engages in. Also, Patrick and Pintrich (2001) suggest that some teachers' beliefs are explicit, tacit, and concrete in nature while some are implicit. Fang (1996, p. 51) points out that all teachers hold implicit beliefs about

students, the participants they teach and their teaching responsibilities, and ... these theories influence teachers' reactions .... to their teaching practice.

Clark and Peterson (1984) also note that beliefs are implicit and therefore the possible conflict between teachers' underlying beliefs and the philosophy of changes to teachers' practices might not be clear to teachers. Therefore, such tacit beliefs need to be uncovered in order to understand beliefs, suggest change to teachers' practices, and understand why innovations do not work as they are intended once implemented in the classroom. The discussion of the latter will be expanded in the following section.

### **2.6.3 Teachers' beliefs about mandated reforms**

It is widely claimed in the reform literature that curriculum reform often affects teachers' beliefs and can cause an uneasiness or sometimes reluctance among implementers. As Fullan (1993, p.22) argues: "you cannot make people change; you cannot force individuals to think differently or compel them to develop new skills." According to Orafi and Borg (2009) teachers may feel ill-equipped to implement change as it often proposes practices which challenge their beliefs and experiences, which threaten their authority, and which weaken their ability to cope effectively. Consequently, innovation may create conflict with teachers' beliefs and often be seen as a negative change. As Spratt (2005) indicates in her study about the washback effect on teaching and learning, the impact of educational innovation is rarely reflected in the teaching and learning process as it was planned due to the teachers' negative attitudes towards the innovation. Researchers attribute this to the gap between beliefs/practices and reform which can interfere with the latter.

The literature of educational reform highlights the influence of teachers' reaction towards the mandated reforms and its relationship with their actual practices. For example, Sikes (2013) claims, failing to preoccupy teachers' attitudes about the nature of change could result in superficial implementation of innovation. He also argues that teachers tend to do whatever they see right to do even if it is against the goals of the innovation. This reaction towards innovation was found by McCallum et al. (1993) who investigated the implementation of teacher assessment in the UK nearly two decades ago. They found that some teachers in their study ignored the assessment during teaching as they found it unfeasible to teach and collect information about learners at the same time. However, that study only explored teachers' views through a survey and interviews. The finding of that study reflects those of Hennessy et al. (2005) who report that mathematics teachers showed a negative attitude to use ICT in the assessment of their learners due to its difficulty in real practice. The teachers adopted instead the more familiar approaches of traditional examinations. In ELT, a number of studies provide evidence of the impact of negative beliefs which teachers may hold towards innovation in assessment on teachers' actual assessment practice. For example, Al-Kindy (2009, p.132) found that teachers' perceptions towards CA implementation were not always positive. This was attributed to the negative attitudes which teachers held towards CA as they had "doubts about how CA



will contribute to learners' achievement and doubts about their own role in the classroom in the new system" (see also Vandeyar and Killen, 2007).

Another factor found in the literature (both general and ELT) that may influence teachers' reaction towards educational reforms is their long experience in teaching (Basturkmen, 2012; Huberman, 1988; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Sikes, 2013). For example, Sikes (2013) argues that experienced teachers tend to show a negative attitude towards change and often react towards it in a dismissive way. Also, Basturkmen (2012), from the literature on language education, concludes that beliefs of experienced teachers become more firmly embedded in their practices over time, which as a result hardens their resistance towards new policies. Some studies from the general education literature present evidence of more experienced teachers' reaction towards educational changes. For example, Hargreaves (2005) reports that more experienced teachers tend to be less active and less engaged in the implementation of change. Also, Dowrich (2008) who investigated teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the CA programme in Trinidad and Tobago, finds that the more experienced teachers showed less commitment to do CA in practice than less experienced teachers.

The finding from the studies above support Wall (2000), who asserts that change is not always desirable for many teachers and successful implementation of new practices is dependent on the nature of their attitude towards them. Imposed reform cannot achieve its goals if the main implementers do not share positive attitudes towards it (Sikes, 2013).

#### **2.6.4 Context as a mediator of beliefs and practice**

Studies recognize that context mediates between beliefs and practice (Schraw and Olafson, 2003; Agee, 2004; Andrews, 2003; Feryok, 2008; Richards et al., 2001; Borg, 2003; Basturkmen, 2012). For example, S. Borg (2003, p. 81) finds that there are some "contextual factors playing an important role in determining the extent to which teachers are able to implement instruction congruent with their cognitions". In both general and ELT literature it is widely accepted that the context in which teachers work can impose a variety of constraints on teachers' beliefs and their abilities to provide instruction that aligns with their beliefs (Andrews, 2003; Feryok, 2008; Richards et al., 2001; Basturkmen, 2012; Fang, 1996; Borg, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Holliday, 1994). For example, Holliday (1994, p.11&129) describes the influence of workplace context as the 'deep action' of local cultures. According to him there are factors at school level and in

'the wider educational institution' that may influence what happens in the classroom such as authority's interference, fellow teachers, learners, parents and norms among peers or colleagues. In addition, Andrews (2003, p.372) identifies some contextual influences on teacher' beliefs and practices such as the syllabus, the textbooks, the assessment system, the expectations of parents, and learner characteristics. Moreover, Fullan (1985) claims that the pressure from peers and other technical and administrative leaders may influence teachers' views regarding the expected innovation.

The influence of the working context has emerged in some studies which investigated teachers' practices in both the mainstream and ELT literature. From the mainstream education, Mansour (2009) observes that the socialisation effect of the context was so powerful that despite having differing beliefs about mathematics and its teaching, teachers in the same school were often observed to adopt similar classroom practices due to the influence of their colleagues. In ELT, Cook (2010) finds in her study that the major barrier to applying reform-oriented CLT practices in the Japanese EFL classes was the teachers' awareness of their learners' and colleagues' expectations of what should be taught and learned; the teachers faced the pressure of being ostracized by more senior teachers attempting communicative innovations. Also, Jones and Fong (2007) provide evidence of the influence of the contextual factors on teachers' beliefs. They interviewed 30 pre-service and 27 in-service secondary EFL teachers and find that many of the teachers believed in the effectiveness of CLT but they did not use it in their teaching due to contextual constrains such as large-size classes and lack of time for preparation.

In the assessment literature of general education, Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt (2009) validate a theoretical framework suggested by Hargreaves et al. (2002, p. 69) which includes four different types of factors underlying teachers' perception towards using alternative assessment practices. Among those four types, the cultural factors (e.g. the influence of social and cultural context of schools) and the political factors (e.g. authority's influence) are dominant factors in mediating between teachers' beliefs and their actual assessment practices. In their study, Hargreaves et al. (2002) find that the motivation of teachers to innovate seemed to be externally regulated i.e. determined mainly by what others wanted rather than by the teachers' intrinsic drive to adopt new assessment practices. They relate this to the fact that the innovation in assessment seems to be a sensitive issue more than other curriculum innovations as it is linked with certifying and grading of learners. The special importance of this issue to many

stakeholders in the educational context such as education ministry officials, school principals, parents and learners can affect teachers' desire to innovate (Hargreaves et al., 2002). Also, Daugherty (1996) in his evaluation of teacher assessment in England and Wales referred to the influence of some contextual factors such as the influence of moderation on shaping teachers' assessment practices inside the classroom.

Having discussed the studies which investigated the mediation effect of context between beliefs and actual practices from both general and language education, the next section discusses this issue in English language assessment in particular.

### **2.6.5 Context as a mediator of beliefs and assessment practices of English language teachers**

One of the main aims of this study is to understand the relationship between English language teachers' beliefs and their actual assessment practices. During the past decade there has been considerable interest in exploring the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their assessment practices, and a number of articles have illustrated teachers' beliefs about assessment in different contexts (Ponte, 2010; Nkosana, 2008; Bullock, 2011; Shohamy et al., 2008; Lumley, 2002; Brown, 2004; Yin, 2010; Rea-Dickins, 2007; Davison, 2004; Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009; Büyükkarcı, 2014).

A number of studies in language education have illustrated the mediating effect that context has on the relationship between beliefs and assessment practices (Shohamy et al., 2008; Bullock, 2011; Yin, 2010; Davison, 2004; Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009; Büyükkarcı, 2014). The data for these studies was derived mainly from questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews, as well as classroom observations. Studies by Shohamy et al. (2008) and Davison (2004) illustrate the point of the mediating effect of context in the field of language teaching. The study by Shohamy et al. (2008) focused on teachers' perceptions and practices of assessing Advanced Language Proficiency learners (ALP). The findings indicate that teachers believe that ALP can only be assessed through the use of multiple assessment procedures such as portfolios, performance tasks, essays, and rubrics and that the assessment process should be ongoing with a formative dimension. However, in terms of the actual uses and practices of assessing ALP, teachers continue to use mostly traditional forms of assessment such as quizzes and tests. Also, Davison (2004), in her study of the contradictory culture of teacher-based assessment (a comparison of ESL teacher assessment practices in

Australian and Hong Kong secondary schools), finds that one of the most influencing factors on teachers' assessment practices is teachers' beliefs about how others will evaluate their behaviour in the classroom, which as a result make teachers alter their assessment practices according to those beliefs. Also, as I reported in Table 3 of studies which investigated assessment reforms worldwide, Shim (2008) reports a number of factors mediating between teachers' strong beliefs about classroom-based assessment and their actual practices of it; these include: overcrowded classrooms, heavy teaching loads, the central bureaucracy of the education system, shortage of funding for foreign language teaching, parents and head teachers' subjectivity. In addition, Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt (2009), who investigate the factors which underlie the perceptions and usage of alternative assessment procedures among EFL teachers in Israel, find that the influence of social and cultural context of schools and authority's influence affect the relationship between teachers' beliefs about alternative assessment and their usage of it.

Some shortcomings have been recognised in the research on assessment discussed above. Generally speaking, the literature shows that the studies that investigated the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their assessment practice (see for example, Yin, 2010; Davison, 2004; Büyükkarcı, 2014) in many cases tend to be limited to considering the beliefs of teachers about assessment without looking at their assessment practice in real classrooms. As Borg (1999a, p.182) points out

since teachers' beliefs are practically-orientated, we cannot study these cognitions without first describing in detail teachers' classroom practices.

Another limitation to some of the language education research discussed above (see for example, Shim, 2008; Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt, 2009) is also that it does not take on board the importance of obtaining teachers' own rationales on their work as a means of understanding their practices. As Borg (1999a, p. 182) also argues

teaching is a very personal, subjective process guided by unobservable cognitive activity which can be made explicit when teachers talk about their instructional decisions.

These shortcomings in the previous research were considered in the design of this research as illustrated in Chapter 3.

### **2.6.6 Influence of hierarchy of beliefs**

The relationship between beliefs and actual practices can be affected by the tension that may possibly occur between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs (Pajares, 1992). Teachers' beliefs systems comprise both core and peripheral beliefs (Pajares, 1992). "Core beliefs are stable and exert a more powerful influence on behaviour" (Phipps and Borg, 2009, p. 381). These beliefs are more central and resistant to change, whereas peripheral beliefs are more able to be reflected upon and changed (Brownlee et al., 2001).

In the ELT literature some studies have explored this issue of the tension between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs and found strong evidence of such influence on teachers' beliefs and actual practices (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Niu and Andrews, 2012; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Mohamed, 2006). These studies mainly used quantitative methods to investigate this issue, though Phipps and Borg used interviews and observation to examine the tensions in the grammar teaching beliefs and practices.

All these studies find some mismatches between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice and relate these mismatches to a hierarchy of beliefs, in that some beliefs are core and others are secondary. The studies show that the discrepancy between the teachers' stated beliefs about language learning and their practices is mainly related to more "deeper, more general beliefs about learning" held by the teachers (Phipps and Borg, 2009, p. 387). Although the teachers in these studies had beliefs about the value of some newly recommended teaching approaches, they adopted the traditional approaches as they reflected their beliefs that learning is enhanced when those practices are used. For example, in Niu and Andrews' (2012) study, the teachers adopted teaching approaches which suited the real situation in their classrooms, even though they believed in more modern approaches in teaching vocabulary. All the above studies agreed upon one conclusion, when a conflict between beliefs arise, the stronger, more deeply held belief is likely to drive teachers' behaviour. These studies have explored this issue of the tension between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs in the area of English teaching and learning. However, this issue has yet to be explored in the area of language assessment.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter has brought several implications for the study. First, CA is an important aspect of English language teaching and learning and thus its

implementation in practice requires thorough investigation. Although there have been many theoretical arguments for and against CA with regard to the benefits of CA for learning, very little is known about the actual benefits of CA in real classrooms during the implementation process. Second, the introduction of CA in many contexts in general and in the Omani Educational system in particular represented a significant change in principles of assessing learners. Teachers were required to implement new assessment practices, adopt new roles, and to accept new assumptions regarding assessment. Third, in light of the literature on educational innovation, the way the innovation was introduced requires special attention. For example, the innovation was introduced on the expectation that teachers would see the advantages of this innovation, and therefore they would easily implement it. There was little consideration as to what actually happens inside the classrooms during the implementation process. Another concern is that little attention was paid to the role of teachers' beliefs and other contextual factors in hindering or facilitating the implementation of CA innovation. Despite the growing research interest in teacher assessment practice, not enough is known as to what underlies teachers' decisions whether or how to implement CA in their classrooms and the beliefs that motivate their classroom real CA practices.

The arguments, factors, and issues presented throughout this literature review as well as the identified limitations of some of the research on CA and some of its components underpin the rationale for this study and inform its methodology. The latter is the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, despite the growing research interest in teacher assessment practice, there has been very little investigation into English language teachers' beliefs about CA, and their actual practices. Thus, there is a need for research of this kind in Oman where little systematic information exists about the teachers of English beliefs and practices of CA. Both the context and the theoretical background discussed so far informed the design, including the research questions, of the present study.

This chapter focuses on the research methodology of the study. It starts by presenting the general aim of the study and the research questions. Next, it clarifies the overall research paradigm and the study type. In addition, the chapter describes the group of participants and the context of the study. A detailed account of the research methods, data collection process, and data analysis are then presented together with some clarifications of issues related to the quality of the research. This is followed by comments on issues related to the ethical considerations.

### **3.1 Aims and research questions**

The main aim of the study was to investigate English teachers' actual practices of CA focusing, in particular, on the relationship between their beliefs about and their actual practices of CA. It also aimed at investigating the factors that influence CA implementation.

Based on the description of the context of the study as well as the discussion in the literature review chapter, this study was guided by the following general research questions:

1. What are English teachers' beliefs about CA?
2. To what extent and how do four English teachers in a Cycle 2 school implement CA in their classrooms?
3. To what extent are teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about CA?
4. What according to English teachers are the factors that influence their CA practices?

### **3.2 Pragmatic approach**

This study followed a pragmatic approach, and in this section I will now explain and justify this approach.

Bryman (2006, p.116) argues that

it is less to do with an allegiance to a distinct set of philosophical principles than a generalized commitment to needing to conduct research that will answer certain kinds of research questions.

Pragmatism supports the notion of giving priority to the technical decisions about the appropriate use of different methods, the nature of the research and how the research methods will give in-depth insights of the outcomes (Bryman, 2006). Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998, p.22) explain that

decisions regarding the use of qualitative or quantitative methods (or both) depend upon the research question as it is currently posed and the phase of the research cycle that is ongoing.

As we can see from the research questions listed in the previous section, they sought to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice. This required starting the investigation from one standpoint and then following it up further through a number of stages in order to have in-depth understanding of the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice. For example, RQ1 targeted teachers stated beliefs about CA, which required involving a large number of teachers in order to explore their beliefs about CA. RQ2 then examined the beliefs by looking at teachers' actual practices and then talking to teachers in order to explore further the motives behind their actual practices. Thus, by considering critically this important aspect of answering the research questions, I realised that the mixed-methods research is the most appropriate approach for my study as I explain in the next section.

### **3.3 Mixed methods research design**

For this study I adopted mixed-methods research design which is characterized as research that contains elements of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Rocco et al., 2003). Mixed-methods research design, according to Creswell (2009), is a procedure for collecting, analysing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study to understand a research problem. Also, Creswell (2009) states that the most



commonly used type of mixed-methods design in educational research is the triangulation design.

Triangulation design, according to Cohen, et al. (2000, p. 113) is the adoption of multiple methods so that the researcher can

map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than standpoint and, in so doing, by making use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

As previously stated, the study mainly focused on understanding the relationship between teachers' beliefs about and their actual use of CA and the major factors influencing this relationship. Eliciting teachers' beliefs and looking at what teachers do in their actual classroom settings requires investigating them from different standpoints and from different angles. Therefore, for this study I adopted a triangulation design. The use of the triangulation design helps different types of methods (quantitative or qualitative) complement each other and at the same time provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Similarly, Creswell (2009) provides other justifications for the use of triangulation. A primary purpose of triangulation is initiation, in which results from one method suggest new directions for the research. The second purpose is expansion, which may clarify results or add richness to the findings (Creswell, 2009). However, according to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), triangulation has several weaknesses. One weakness is that it could be time consuming and effortful for the researcher as it involves more participants and more activities, which also consumes more expenses. Other challenges could be related to the data analysis because consolidating quantitative and qualitative data can be difficult for the researcher.

### **3.4 Research Methods**

I used three types of research instruments: questionnaires, classroom observations, and interviews. In the following, I provide justification for the use of the three methods.

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaires**

I used a questionnaire to specifically elicit teachers' beliefs about CA and to identify the challenges they felt affected their implementation of CA. As stated earlier, most of the studies that have investigated teachers' beliefs (see 2.5 & 2.6.4) used questionnaires as the main research instrument. Also, Cohen et al. (2000, p.245) argued that questionnaires are

...useful instruments for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher and often being comparatively straightforward to analyse. Questionnaires allow one to quantify peoples' observations, interpretations and attitudes.

Questionnaires are the most commonly used tool in research because they can be applied across a large geographical area (Bryman, 2001; Cohen et al., 2000). Thus, questionnaires are suitable for the current study, if we consider the large number of English teachers who are spread throughout the schools in the Dhahira Region (see Table 6 below), as will be explained in depth later on in this chapter. Other advantages of using questionnaires are that they are relatively economical, they pose standardized questions, the questions can be written for specific purposes, and they can ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents (Dörnyei, 2007). Regarding the latter point, it is less likely that the data would be affected by subjectivity or respondents' biases (Cohen et al., 2000).

According to Cohen et al. (2000), there are several kinds of question and response formats used in questionnaires, including dichotomous questions, multiple-choice questions, rating scales, and open-ended questions. I mainly used closed questions to facilitate the task of respondents, but I also included some open-ended questions to provide respondents with space to explain their answers or express their views (Cohen et al., 2000). I explain the types of questions in depth in section 3.7, and this is presented together with the qualities of effective questionnaires.

Although questionnaires have gained a good grounding as a research method, there are some limitations which researchers need to take into consideration. One limitation is that respondents have to deal with the instruments themselves without the presence of the researcher, so it is not possible to explain any items in the questionnaire that participants might misinterpret (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). Other limitations, respondents may provide superficial or incomplete answers especially if the questionnaire takes a long time to complete, the topic is not in their interest or if they are reluctant to reveal the information (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). Regarding the limitation of using questionnaires in the study of teachers' beliefs, Borg (2006b) highlights the following potential problems:

- Questionnaires are inadequate to be used on their own in a situation where there is an interest in teachers' beliefs about real classroom practices

- The statements of the questionnaire are defined by the researcher, so they may not reflect the full range of beliefs that the respondents have.
- The evidence of change provided by questionnaires is theoretical and thus cannot be used to make judgment about changes in what teachers do in real practice.

### 3.4.2 Observations

The second research method I used was observation and this was particularly useful to collect data about teachers' actual implementation of CA. Borg (2006b, p.247) considers observation as a valuable method in the study of language teacher beliefs "because it provides evidence of what happens in classrooms". Observing what teachers actually do provides more trustworthy data because the observer collects 'live' data from real situations (Cohen et al., 2000). Borg (2006b) in his review of research on language teacher cognition which has utilized observation, finds that the majority of the studies used unstructured, non-participant observation strategies. Unstructured observation is characterised by providing a full account of the events under study and by the use of field notes, and audio recording or video for collecting data (Borg, 2006b). Also, it can involve a range of written records of events observed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Unstructured observation is considered qualitative, drawing "the researcher into the phenomenological complexity of participants' world" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.379). Table 4 illustrates the rationale behind choosing unstructured observation for this study:

**Table 4: Advantages of the unstructured observation**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires less preparation time before the event (Cohen et al., 2000).</li><li>• Provides more flexibility and openness for the observer (Cohen et al., 2000).</li><li>• Produces a narrative account of all that is seen by the observer (Borg, 2006b).</li><li>• Provides a means of finding out about natural behaviours as performed actively within the real situation and the representations of the meanings of the performers within that settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994).</li><li>• It allows opportunities for raising questions according to what is noticed of observed behaviours, which can be used as a basis for further exploration through further sources of data (Robson, 2002).</li></ul>
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However, it should be noted here that unstructured observations have their own limitations. They require a longer time to analyse the data collected since it will be,

according to Cohen et al. (2000), extensive, complex and diverse compared to data collected in structured observations.

In addition, observations in general have some limitation in that it may affect the observee's behaviour in the classroom. Participants may change their behaviour; they may try harder in the class; they may feel more anxious; they may behave much better or much worse than normal (Dörnyei, 2007). However, in my view, this change in behaviour among participants is unavoidable, but it is possible to be minimized by the researcher. Therefore, I tried to minimize the effect of my role as an observer on teachers' behaviour in the classroom by adopting the following strategies suggested by Thomas (1998):

- establishing a trusting relationship in which the participants are made aware of the role of the observer;
- explaining the purpose and process of the observation to the participants beforehand as to minimise any stress that might be caused by the presence of the observer in the classroom;
- explaining to the participants that the information gathered during the observation will be used for research purposes only, and thus will not cause any negative consequences for them.

Non-participant observations were my choice for data collection from teachers' classrooms. In non-participant observations, the observers stand detached from the group being observed, having little interaction with them (Blaxter et al., 2006; Wellington, 2000). In choosing this type of observation, I considered the fact that the more the researcher is actively involved with the respondents, the greater the chance that this involvement will significantly alter what occurs in real classroom (Blaxter et al., 2006; Bryman, 1984). Although, as I illustrated above, change in behaviour among participants during observations is expected, non-participant observations may reduce such change in their behaviour.

Moreover, as this study investigates the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices, I considered Borg's (2006b, p.247) argument:

Observation on its own ... provides an inadequate basis for the study of what teachers think, know, and believe. Researchers may draw inferences about cognition from what is observed, but verification for these must be sought through further sources of data.

Thus, I used interviews for the latter purpose.

### 3.4.3 Interviews

I used interviews for two purposes, first for further follow-up and verification of teachers' answers in the questionnaire, and second for in-depth investigation of the issues identified from the observations.

Interviews are useful as a follow-up to certain respondents to further investigate their responses (McNamara,1999, cited in Valenzuela and Shrivastava, 2007) and explore thinking and understanding of their points of view. Interviews also seek 'the unobservable' values of people's beliefs, views, perspectives and understandings (Wellington, 2000, p.71). They are particularly useful for getting the story behind a participant's experiences as the interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic.

Different types of interviews exist. They vary according to the structure of the interview, how deep the interview tries to go, and the degree to which the interview is standardized across different respondents and situation. The most common typology of interviews is as follows: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews.

**Table 5: Comparison of the three types of interviews**

<b>Structured interviews</b>	<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	<b>Unstructured interviews</b>
Pre-determined set of questions	Have an agenda of general themes	Allow participants to talk freely
Permit very little flexibility	Allow eliciting more details and explanations	Allow more flexibility to elaborate
Conducted face-to-face in a formal structured setting and can be done over the phone too	Interviewer has some control over the flow of the interview	Reduce the effect of the interviewer
Provide less details	Provide more details	Provide in-depth detail
Less time to analyse	More time to analyse	Very time consuming to analyse
Easier to be analysed and interpreted	Difficult to be analysed and may provide irrelevant data	Data may often be irrelevant and hard to analyse
Can be used with large samples	Less suitable for larger samples	Unsuitable for larger samples

Table 5 above compares these types according to (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008; Patton, 2002; Wellington, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Fontana and Frey, 1994). From the table we can see that each type of interviews has its advantages and disadvantages. I used semi-

structured interviews for the following advantages. First for their flexibility; although semi-structured interviews contain suggested questions on a number of themes, they offer openness to change of sequence and form questions in response to a specific answer given by a participant. This was very useful in the post-lesson interviews that I conducted. Such flexibility allowed by this approach gave me chance to amend my questions according to the teachers' practices I observed. In addition, semi-structured interviews allow probes, and this gave me more confidence to seek for more explanations and clarify meanings about some of teachers' practices and behaviours. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are less time consuming and their set of general themes allows for questions to be added or changed during the interview itself (Borg, 2006b).

Nevertheless, semi-structured interviews have some limitations. The flexibility in this method can affect the way different respondents answer the same questions, and thus reduces comparability (Cohen et al., 2000). Such flexibility may also cause a problem if participants deviate from the topic being researched. In addition, semi-structured interviews require careful use by the researcher, such as asking probing questions or repeating the question when necessary and judging the answers (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002).

### **3.5 Targeted population**

According to Cohen, et al.(2000), a targeted population is a group of respondents from whom the researcher is interested in collecting information and drawing conclusions. The targeted population of this study comprises all Cycle 2 teachers of English in the government schools in Dhahira. In the following I first justify the choice of Dhahira as the place of the study and then I provide the reasons for choosing Cycle 2 teachers to be the participants of this study.

Choosing Dhahira to be the place of the study was for the following reasons. Dhahira was where I was working which gave me easy access to gatekeepers to make the necessary arrangements for data collection. In addition, the Educational Governorate of Dhahira has a variety of school types which are distributed between urban and rural areas as is the case all over Oman. Also, Dhahira was a typical Omani Educational Governorate for conducting the study because teachers in Dhahira have relatively similar pre-service and in-service training background and they use the same curriculum as other teachers in the other 11 Educational Governorates in Oman.

The study focused on teachers in all Cycle 2 schools in Dhahira Educational Governorate. The total number of English teachers at the time of study in these schools was 306 (see Table 6 below). Cycle 2 was chosen to provide a specific focus for the investigation of CA – it would not have been feasible to study all three cycles of English teachers. In addition, focusing on a group of teachers who follow the same MOE policy of CA implementation provided a clear focus for the research. The number of teachers in Cycle 2 was larger than the total number of English teachers in the other two cycles. Table 6 illustrates the study participants according to teachers' gender and location of schools in the three Wilayats (Districts) in Dhahira.

**Table 6: The distribution of Cycle 2 teachers of English in the 3 Wilayats in Dhahira**

Wilayats	Male	Female	Total
Ibri	94	136	230
Yanqul	16	21	37
Dhank	14	25	39
Total	124	182	306

### **3.5.1 Classroom observations and interviews sample**

For the qualitative part of this study, I focused on six teachers from Cycle 2 schools. Focusing on a small number of teachers increases the number of classroom observations for each teacher and aids sufficient data collection and any follow-up of aspects arising from every observation. Teachers were selected from the questionnaire respondents who indicated their willingness to be observed and interviewed as a follow-up to the questionnaire. Teachers were contacted to arrange the classroom observations and post-lesson interviews. The classes observed were chosen randomly according to teachers' timetables in order to avoid teachers' deliberate selection of best classes with their best/most responsive learners.

### **3.6 Language of data collection**

I did originally consider using Arabic, but English was used here in both questionnaire and interviews for the following reasons:

- English has a number of benefits such as saving time required for translation, avoiding inappropriate interpretation or mistranslation and providing direct quotes expressed by interviewees themselves to support my arguments.

- From my experience of dealing with English teachers, I felt that using English would encourage teachers to express their views because all the participants are teachers of English and their English is good enough to understand verbal explanations and to respond in English.
- Using English would make it easier for teachers to be critical about their assessment practices as they usually do in normal post-lesson discussions during supervisory visits.
- This decision was also welcomed by the teachers themselves, who stated that they preferred to speak in English, when I suggested the alternative option of speaking in Arabic.

### 3.7 Description of the questionnaire

I developed a specific questionnaire for the purpose of the first stage of this study. The research questions were the most important factor I considered when I started thinking about items of questionnaire. Different issues were also considered in the design of the questionnaire to obtain good quality design such as avoiding leading questions, avoiding complex questions, avoiding questions that use negatives, and avoiding too many items in each section (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). Also, I made sure that the questionnaire had a clear, logical, and well-marked structure and appearance (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010). I used various approaches in writing the questionnaire items by employing different types of questions, including Likert-scale questions, multiple choices, and open-ended questions (see Table 7 below). Using a variety of questioning techniques aids in acquiring the required information from the respondents in various ways (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003).

The development of the questionnaire involved several steps to reach the final draft. First, the questionnaire items were designed to reflect understanding from the literature about teachers' beliefs, characteristics of CA and teachers' CA practices. After I identified the main items, I grouped them into four different sections (see Table 7 below).

**Table 7: Questionnaire framework**

Sections	Questions	Content	Question type
1. Personal information	1-7	Gender, nationality, position, teaching qualifications, teaching experience, grades taught, the number of learners in classes	Multiple choice



	8	The grade(s) taught by teachers	Open-ended
2. Teachers' beliefs	1-20	Teachers' beliefs about assessment	Likert-scale
3. Teachers' knowledge	1-11	1. Understanding of CA practices 2. Knowledge of key features of CA implementation	Likert-scale
4. Teachers' practices	A & B	Teachers' CA practices	Yes/No Open-ended
	C	Challenges in CA implementation	
	D & E	Training programs related to the implementation of CA	

The first section of the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) included eight items asking for demographic details (e.g. gender and nationality), and background information related to teaching. The next three sections of the questionnaire were formed according to three main themes derived from the research questions and they are as follows:

- Teachers' beliefs about assessment
- Teachers' understanding of CA practices
- Teachers' practices of CA

The second section of the questionnaire was five-point Likert-scale questions ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). Although the Likert-scale may have different response points, the five-point scale is "most practical, most common, easy to respond to, straightforward to analyse and sufficient for most needs" (Anderson and Arsenault, 1998, p.174). The three-point Likert-scale in the third section of the questionnaire, however, was also useful to identify teachers' understanding of CA.

The fourth section was an open-ended type and it asked teachers to firstly indicate whether they are using CA in their classrooms. It then requested them to provide up to three examples of their CA practices if they say that they are using CA. If not, teachers were asked to specify the factors or reasons for not using CA in their classrooms.

### **3.8 Assessing the reliability of the questionnaire**

The questionnaire was revised several times before it was sent for piloting. Opinions from my supervisors were sought to strengthen it, adding to advice identified from the relevant literature. This process included removing ambiguity in the items, discarding items that were found to be repetitive and enhancing the structure and the appearance of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was then piloted with a sample of 30 teachers in a region other than Dhahira. The purpose of piloting was to refine the items in the questionnaire, and to get more feedback from the participants about the clarity of items and their function. Piloting is considered an important step that should be undertaken by researchers during the process of developing questionnaires (Dörnyei and Taguchi, 2010; Wilkinson and Birmingham, 2003). According to Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010), piloting the questionnaire may help in making informed decisions regarding keeping some items, rewriting and/or rephrasing some others, and even deleting problematic items. This in turn will add to the quality of the questionnaire and obtain good quality data. In addition, incorporating required changes to questionnaires after the piloting stage may help in increasing the response rate and considering other options for administering it to the participants during the main study. In the following, I provide a detailed description of the piloting stage.

As I stated earlier that the participants of the study were all teachers of English in all Cycle 2 schools in Dhahira. For this reason, I decided not to involve any of them in the piloting stage. Therefore, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 English teachers from Cycle 2 schools in a nearby region called Dakhilya. I emailed a copy of the questionnaire to my friend who works as a supervisor of English teachers in Dakhilya. After one week, I got back 28 questionnaires.

There were some observations and implications from the piloting stage which could be summarized as follows:

- All teachers filled in all the background section of the questionnaire. These details were useful and necessary in getting an overall picture of the demographic features of the participants.
- The data gathered from the questionnaire revealed that teachers had filled in almost all the statements. Overall, teachers did not report any difficulty in understanding the different statements. According to teachers' responses, only two items showed some ambiguity and therefore they were modified.
- Reliability analysis was carried out by running Cronbach's Alpha test (Howitt and Cramer, 2001) to check the internal consistency of the Likert-scale items on teachers' beliefs about assessment in the second section of the questionnaire. Checking the scale's internal consistency was useful to examine the degree to which the items that make up the scale 'hang together' and measure the same

underlying construct (Pallant, 2004). One of the most common measures of internal consistency is Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Ideally, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of a scale should be above 0.70 (Pallant, 2004; Field and Hole, 2003; Howitt and Cramer, 2001). The second section of the questionnaire consists of 20 statements, ten statements argue for traditional assessment and the other ten argue for CA. The Cronbach's alpha was found to be reliable for both groups: for the first group it showed 0.809 of Cronbach's Alpha and for the latter group it showed 0.878.

- After looking at teachers' responses to the open-ended question about teachers' practices of CA, I realised that I needed to add another question about the challenges that teachers face in their implementation of CA. This question was then added in the final version of the questionnaire.
- Very few respondents reported that they attended training about CA implementation, though this training should be available in the region where the piloting was carried out. I realized that this was due to the ambiguity of the phrase 'training programmes' which might be wrongly interpreted by the respondents. Therefore, I changed it to 'training sessions/courses' to make it clearer for them.
- The question in the questionnaire about teachers' participation in the qualitative stage of the study showed eight teachers (six males and two females), representing 28.60% of the respondents involved, were willing to be involved in that stage. This percentage gave me an indicator that a considerable number of teachers would be available for the actual study.

### **3.9 Recording observation**

Researchers on language teachers' beliefs usually use manual (e.g. observation schedules or field notes) and technology means (e.g. audio) to record observational data (Borg, 2006b). In this study, both audio recording and observation schedules were used. Although designing observational schedules is time-consuming, they provide convenient gathering of data during the observations while the information is still fresh in the researcher's mind; researchers, however, need to carefully design the schedule using their knowledge, expectations and experience (Cohen, et al., 2000).

The observation schedule includes factual information about the lesson observed such as time and duration of the lesson, number of learners, and seating (see Appendix 2). There

are four major themes which constitute the different parts of the observation. These themes reflect the objectives of the study and the second research question which aims at exploring teachers' actual assessment practices (see 3.1). The themes are as follows: lesson plan, role of the teacher, feedback, and use of CA tools. Next to each theme, there is a space provided for the observer to have sufficient room for notes. The fifth row of the schedule is left open for free notes.

In the initial plan for data collection, I designed a semi-structured schedule with predetermined examples of CA practices that teachers were expected to do during teaching. Initially, I thought these examples might help me during observation. However, I thought that some important issues might occur during the observation that I had not anticipated in the schedule. Therefore, I piloted the observation schedule in three classroom observations to check its feasibility to be used for data collection. As a result of these observations, I realised that the examples suggested under the themes would restrict my observation attention as they did not reflect the nature of unstructured observation I intended to conduct (see 3.3.2). Therefore, I deleted the examples because I felt they distracted my attention as I kept expecting them to occur during the lessons. In addition, I increased the width of the columns to provide more space for comments and I added another blank column for more free notes.

The observed lessons were not videoed for fear of causing unnecessary stress to participants, so I mainly took notes in the observation schedule to capture a rich picture of events, and audio-recorded in order to maximize the accuracy of the data collected, and hence the descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2005) and to aid memory of events missed by the note-taking. I used a small digital voice recorder because I thought it would not cause much disturbance to both the teacher and learners and I kept it on the teacher's table. After a time I felt that both of them had forgotten its existence in the class (see more details in 3.10.2).

### **3.10 Data collection process**

The data collection process was carried out in two stages, namely, the questionnaire stage and the observation and interview stage.

### **3.10.1 The questionnaire stage**

The first stage of the study comprises questionnaire administration to teachers of English in Cycle 2 schools in Dhahira. The statistics I received from the planning department in the Directorate General of Education at the time of the fieldwork showed 306 teachers in this cycle. However, when I contacted the English Supervision Unit in the region, they provided me with another list of 283 teachers. The difference in the number of teachers between the two lists was due to various types of leave taken by teachers (e.g. maternity leave). Therefore, I considered the second list and thus distributed 283 questionnaires. In the preliminary plan, it was intended to send the questionnaires through mailboxes in which official documents are usually sent to schools. However, I realized that using schools mailboxes would take longer for the questionnaire to reach schools. Therefore, I coordinated with senior teachers in all the participating schools and I personally submitted the questionnaires to them. In some cases, I had to travel for longer distances to ensure safe arrival of them. In doing so, I ensured that all questionnaires reached schools safely in a short time. Also, I encouraged senior teachers to ensure a smooth distribution of questionnaires in their schools, inform teachers about the nature of the study, and convey the message to teachers that all information gained will be used confidentially and their participation is optional. Only a few schools reported some missing questionnaires and therefore I, myself, delivered them to those particular schools. I had good contact with senior teachers and easy access to schools to facilitate this process, as I was a former staff in Dhahira Educational Governorate. Despite the early arrangements, there were some unforeseen constraints throughout the data collection process. I present these constraints in the fieldwork challenges section (see 3.11 below) along with the actions taken to deal with each of them.

After three weeks, I got back most of the questionnaires by contacting the senior teachers and by travelling myself to some remote schools. After that, the questionnaires were submitted to an initial analysis for the purpose of identifying key issues to be further investigated at the observation and interview stage (see more details in 3.10.2). Participants of the questionnaires who volunteered to participate in the second stage of the research were contacted ( see details of the criteria for choosing the volunteers in the next section).

### 3.10.2 Stage two

One aim behind conducting the second stage of research was to relate teachers' beliefs and understanding of CA to their actual assessment practices. While the questionnaire was aimed at exploring teachers' beliefs about and practices of CA, the observation, interview and documentary evidence focused on finding examples of their actual CA practices and investigating their beliefs and actual practices in more detail. The second stage of the study involved classroom observations, post-lesson interviews and documentary evidence. I conducted this stage after one month of the beginning of the second semester of school year 2011/2012. I chose the second semester so that I could see the CA practices that happened during the first semester and the first month of second semester from teachers' CA records.

63 volunteers (28.6%), as Table 8 below shows, agreed to participate in the qualitative stage of the study. They provided their contact details as requested.

**Table 8: Participation in the second stage of the study**

	Frequency	Percent
YES	63	26.6
NO	158	66.7
Total	221	93.2
Missing	16	6.8

I used SPSS to run the initial analysis of section two in the questionnaire for the purpose of identifying the participants for the qualitative stage of the study. Section two of the questionnaire contains 20 statements, ten of them argue for CA and the rest argue for traditional assessment. An average score of the ten statements which argue for CA was calculated to show the level of CA beliefs for each participant. The same procedure was carried out for the other ten statements, which argue for traditional assessment, in order to attain the level of traditional assessment beliefs of every participant. This strategy of analysis intended to show a ranking in which each respondent has a score for CA beliefs and another score for traditional assessment beliefs (see Table 9 below). As Table 9 shows, from the 63 volunteers two main groups emerged according to their beliefs about CA and traditional assessment: the first is a larger group of participants of high scores of CA beliefs and low scores of traditional assessment beliefs (see Group 1 in Table 9); the other group of participants had clearly strong beliefs about CA, but at the same time they were relatively strong in their traditional assessment beliefs (see Group 2 in Table 9).



14	4.90	3.40	Yes	54	4.50	4.50	Yes
23	4.10	2.60	Yes	65	3.90	3.40	Yes
27	4.50	3.10	Yes	71	4.33	4.00	Yes
28	4.10	2.90	Yes	97	4.60	4.60	Yes
40	4.80	2.90	Yes	109	4.90	4.40	Yes
53	4.10	2.60	Yes	19	4.60	4.30	Yes
66	4.44	2.90	Yes	30	4.50	3.70	Yes
82	4.30	2.80	Yes	196	4.40	4.10	Yes
98	4.20	2.70	Yes	105	4.20	4.00	Yes
102	5.00	2.60	Yes	195	4.30	4.22	Yes
132	3.90	2.80	Yes	13	400	380	Yes
159	4.30	2.63	Yes	25	4.10	4.00	Yes
213	4.10	2.70	Yes	143	4.40	4.22	Yes

### 3.10.2.1 Classroom observations

Table 10 provides contextual information about classroom observations. The following reasons were considered for adopting more than one observation with each teacher: each participating teacher might have his/her own distinctive CA practices which cannot be captured in just one observation; also, assessment does not normally occur regularly in the classroom, therefore, more than one observation would be needed in order to look analytically into what teachers do, what assessment techniques they apply, what documents and records they use. In the preliminary stage, it was intended to conduct three observations for each participant. However, I was only able to do two observations. This happened in my first visit to the second participant (see Hussam in Table 10). He agreed to be observed only twice as he was busy during the following week due to his daughter's illness. After observing him, I realized that two observations were sufficient as I was able to obtain sufficient information about the teachers' practices during the two classroom observations. The follow-up interview also provided sufficient details about teachers' assessment practices as I was able to enquire in depth about what happened in the two lessons and raise questions about teacher's assessment practices which did not occur in those lessons. Therefore, I followed the same procedure with the other four participants, apart from the first teacher who I observed three times as he was the first one to be observed before making my decision to only do two observations. The third observation of this teacher, though, helped in generating useful information.



The observations were of 40-minute lessons. However, there were some cases in which there were delays in starting the lessons, of up to 12 minutes due to some circumstances related to teachers and classrooms settings. The observations were carried out as part of participants' normal teaching. No special preparation was required on their part and I informed them that they should teach as normally and naturally as possible and that I would not be judging their behaviours or performances in any way. I made every effort to reduce the fear and intrusion inevitably caused by any observation. I sat at the back of the class where after sometime I felt that both the teacher and learners got used to my presence.

**Table 10: Classroom observations background information**

Name (pseudonym)	Interviews	Observation date	Observation length	Number of learners
Muhanad	observation 1	11/03/2012	38m	28
	observation 2	12/03/2012	41m	28
	observation 3	14/03/2012	38m	24
Hussam	observation 1	12/03/2012	35m	36
	observation 2	14/03/2012	29m	25
Badar	observation 1	18/03/2012	35m	9
	observation 2	19/03/2012	46m	10
Fukhri	observation 1	20/03/2012	36m	26
	observation 2	21/03/2012	31m	27
Alwaleed	observation 1	26/03/2012	47m	34
	observation 2	27/03/2012	37m	32
Alzahra	observation 1	08/04/2012	42m	24
	observation 2	09/04/2012	29m	22

### 3.10.2.2 Post-lesson interviews

The initial analysis of the observational data produced a number of questions, issues, and themes which were subsequently discussed during the follow up interviews. In order to gain access to the teachers' beliefs about CA and to their actual assessment practices, I used key events from their lessons and some evidence generated from their responses to the questionnaire. During the interviews, teachers commented on what they were doing, explained the rationale for their decision making and actions, and identified the different factors, which underlie their assessment practices. They also explained the rationale for

their responses to the questionnaire and showed me some documents of their actual use of CA.

Table 11 provides contextual background about the dates and the length of the interviews. Two follow-up semi-structured interviews were conducted with most of the teachers and were audio recorded using a digital voice recorder. Hussam was the only teacher who I only interviewed once due to his circumstances, but I covered in that interview most of the points from the two observations of his classes. In addition, I conducted three interviews with Alwaleed because I felt I needed to clarify some of his practices in the two lessons I observed with him, which I was not able to cover in the first two interviews. In the preliminary stage, it was intended to conduct the interviews on the next day after every classroom observation. However, flexibility was considered in the timing of the interviews and their lengths according to some circumstances related to both the teachers and interviewer's needs. All teachers preferred to be interviewed on the same day as the observation (except Muhanad who I interviewed on the next day after the classroom observation). Therefore, I asked them to allow me some time to do some preliminary analysis of the observation data before the interviews. It took me about 2/3 hours to prepare for those interviews while I was waiting for teachers to finish their teaching duties. Most of the data I needed for the interview preparation was mainly in the observation schedules and I also referred to the recordings of the lesson to check some unclear notes in my observation schedules. I was also able to recall the information from the observations easily because it was still fresh in my mind. Some of teachers' responses to the questionnaire were also further followed-up and clarified in the interviews.

**Table 11: Interviews background information**

Name	interviews	Interview date	Interview length
Muhanad	Interview 1	12/03/2012	30m
	Interview 2	14/03/2012	28m
Hussam	Interview 1	14/03/2012	40m
Badar	Interview 1	18/03/2012	40m
	Interview 2	19/03/2012	41m
Fukhri	Interview 1	20/03/2012	48m
	Interview 2	21/03/2012	55m
Alwaleed	Interview 1	26/03/2012	28m
	Interview 2	27/03/2012	29m
	Interview 3	28/03/2012	41m

Alzahra	Interview 1	08/04/2012	40m
	Interview 2	09/04/2012	37m

### 3.10.2.3 Documentary evidence

Before, and in some cases during, each interview, I asked teachers about the documents they usually use for the purpose of CA. I looked at a collection of documentary evidence that included teachers' lesson plan, students' written work, CA marks registers, teachers' informal notes, teachers' remedial plans for slow learners and students' portfolios. These documents helped to corroborate and strengthen the evidence from classroom observations and interviews, and to aid the interviews questions. These were discussed with the teachers during the interviews. With teachers' permission, after the interviews I collected copies of these documents for later reference as data.

Documentary evidence can provide valuable information and a source for answers as they provide a useful check on information gathered in an interview (Weiss, 1998) Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) also suggest that when other techniques fail to answer a question, documentary evidence can provide a convincing answer. However, in this study documentary evidence were used together with the evidence from classroom observations and interviews to answer my research questions.

From these different sources, I sought to obtain a comprehensive picture of English teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual implementation of it.

## 3.11 Fieldwork challenges

In this section, I provide a detailed account of the challenges I encountered during the process of the fieldwork. I can summarize these challenges in the following points:

- I planned to distribute the questionnaire during the non-teaching period in late January 2012 as teachers officially had to be in their schools; however, later on I came to realise that the teachers were unofficially released from their duties during that period. This delayed the process of administering the questionnaire for 20 days. However, this waiting period was useful for final checking of the questionnaire, preparing for the administration process and getting some training in using SPSS.
- Teachers were not always able to commit themselves to the requirements of the fieldwork. As mentioned earlier, on one occasion for example, I agreed with the

teacher to do three observations of his classes, but I was only able to do two observations due to his circumstances. In another visit to a female teacher who initially agreed to take part in the study but changed her mind when she realised that she had to be interviewed after every classroom observation. Therefore, I reverted to my reserve list and selected another teacher.

- My previous position as a supervisor created much interest from the principals of schools about some teaching and training issues of English teachers and also about students' achievements in English. Although an official letter was sent to them about my study, I had to explain to the whole school system the purpose of my presence in their school. I had to do this so that the teachers participating in the study would not be influenced by any misconception from the school principals about the nature of my research.
- Some teachers felt uncomfortable when they were asked questions about the role of their supervisors and their senior teachers in supporting their assessment practices. Therefore, I needed to frequently remind the teachers that the information they provide is crucial to the research and absolutely confidential.
- In Omani schools, English teachers usually have their own staff room. During my visit to the first school, I tried to conduct the interviews in that location, but this proved to be difficult because of the frequent interruptions by other English teachers. To overcome this problem I arranged in advance with the head teachers to use a different room for this purpose when possible. There was no problem regarding this issue in the other schools where I was conducting the fieldwork.

To conclude, I would say that many decisions have to be taken by the researcher during the actual conducting of research that were not considered during the preliminary stages. Although I am familiar with the context of the research, it proved that even for the researchers who are familiar with the research context there are certain challenges that have to be faced.

### **3.12 Data organisation, processing and analysis**

The questionnaire, observations and interviews generated two types of data: quantitative and qualitative. For each data type, a number of steps were followed in order to organize the data for the data analysis process.

### **3.12.1 Organisation and analysis of data from the questionnaire**

A total number of 237 questionnaires were received. I organised them by identification codes from 1 to 237 and then, I used SPSS for organizing and analysing data from those questionnaires. The very initial stage of doing so was the process of coding (Cohen et al., 2000). Each of the five answers to the statements in Likert scale questions in section two was given a number: 'strongly agree' was coded as 5 and 'strongly disagree' as 1. Regarding section three about teachers' understanding of CA, 'continuous assessment (CA)' was coded as 1, 'not continuous assessment (NCA)' as 2 and 'not sure (NS)' as 3. Also, "YES" was coded as 1 and "NO" as 2 from the yes and no questions in section 4. With regard to the missing data such as an unanswered statement or a statement which has more than one answer, this was marked as missing when the data was fed into SPSS (coded as 99). There were not many missing answers by the same participant, so there was no questionnaire excluded from the study. Also, there were not many questions left unanswered by a considerable number of respondents, so no statements were omitted from the analysis.

A primary step of checking for errors on the SPSS data file was performed in order to check the accuracy of the data entered. This was done through generating tables of frequencies for all statements and checking the values shown in the output tables particularly the maximum and the minimum values.

After that, the first section in the questionnaire which included items asking teachers for demographic details (e.g. gender and nationality), and background information was analysed by SPSS. This was done in order to get a general idea of the participants with regard to these categories.

This was followed by looking at the individual variables. Frequency distribution analysis was run for each questionnaire statement to check how many respondents have answered in a particular way. This was conducted by producing frequency tables, which provided the number of participants and the percentage belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question. These frequency tables helped in gaining an understanding of the overall distribution of responses at the initial stages of the analysis.

Then, descriptive statistics such as means were calculated. Figures and percentages in the SPSS outputs were presented in tables to help gain an understanding of the patterns of the data.

In respect of section 4 of the questionnaire for the open-ended questions, 207 (87.3%) participants responded to it. I grouped the answers and counted how often each occurred. Then the data which emerged was presented into tables in descending order.

### **3.12.2 Organization and analysis of data from observations and interviews**

Different research textbooks provide a variety of ways of approaching qualitative data analysis, (see, for example, Cohen et al., 2000; Kvale and Brinkman, 2008; Thomas, 2006; Prosser, 2004; Morse and Richards, 2002; Richards, 2005; Wolcott, 1994). According to those textbooks, dealing with qualitative data analysis should take into consideration the nature of the data, the amount of the data and the purpose of the research.

I followed the general inductive approach for the data analysis. In this approach the analysis is carried out through multiple readings and interpretations of the raw data, where the research questions provide a domain of relevance for conducting the analysis (Thomas, 2006). Through this process, the researcher makes decisions on the basis of the research questions about what is more important and less important in the data (Thomas, 2006).

As stated earlier, I used observation schedules and audio recording to gather data from the classroom observations and mainly audio recording to collect information from post-lesson interviews. The first step in the analysis was to transfer the data from the media to the text. The data from the audio recordings of the observations was transcribed selectively but not entirely. This is because information that contributed to the notes in the observation schedules and which offered explanations to those notes was selected: while listening to the audio recordings of each classroom observation, I made notes of the relevant information and at the same time I matched them with the notes in the observation schedules.

Regarding the interviews, all the twelve interviews were transcribed and the data comprised a total of 43,004 words. During the transcription process, note-keeping on initial thoughts on the data helped to make sense of the data and identify key issues and

themes. Looking at the data as originally recorded let the data “speak for themselves” (Wolcott, 1994, p.10). A closer “look” and “re-look” of the interview data was made afterwards in order to develop a comprehensive picture of the content (Wolcott, 1994, p.10)

The data gained from all those sources was examined and compared so that they complemented each other (the data from the observation schedules and explanatory notes of audio recording of the observations was used to complement the data gained from the interviews). This step provided the basis for deriving an overall picture of the sets of data (Prosser, 2004).

Making coding of different types constituted an important step in dealing with the data. According to Thomas (2006), the process of making coding and classification allows for reflection on the data, seeking patterns of thought and developing categories that might help in developing more ideas and themes of relevance to the research questions (Thomas, 2006). It also helps in bringing focus to all details and quotes that add to the understanding of the data (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). For this purpose of coding and classification, I used the computer software NVivo9 (Morse and Richards, 2002). With my research questions in mind, I began with the thematic coding in which all the information from each teacher interview was classified into main categories (nodes) (e.g. CA practices, beliefs about CA, factors influencing CA) (see appendix 5 page 1). Classifying the main categories into sub-categories was the second stage (see appendix 5 pages 2&3). For example, through the NVivo tools I highlighted comments related to beliefs about CA, the influences on these beliefs, and the factors influencing teachers' assessment practices (see appendix 6). This way of organization allowed for convenient handling of the data which also provided easy identification and comparisons of different patterns (Kvale and Brinkman, 2008). Furthermore, it permitted straightforward access to the data for further interpretation and analysis (Richards, 2005).

Once all categories had been organized, I started reading across these categories for each teacher individually to find links among them. I took a closer look at each teacher's classroom observation, post-lesson interview, and documentary evidence. This process of analysis was divided into two steps; firstly, I followed a vertical route (Morse and Richards, 2002) by analysing each individual teacher data which emerged from the observations, interviews and documentary evidence, identifying key and significant points from the observations and matching and comparing them with what came out from

the interview. That is, the categories which emerged from the interview data were checked against the observational data. Teachers' commentaries on their practices were checked against behaviours from the observational data to find evidence of congruence and possibly incongruence between practices and beliefs. In this way, I was able to construct a full account of each teacher's practices and the factors which influence these practices. Secondly, I progressed then horizontally through a "Cross-case syntheses" (Yin, 2003, p.133) to look for similarities, differences or any patterns of categorization that run across the six teachers' data.

The data analysis was then conducted and integrated into the analysis of the questionnaire data as described earlier. For example, the questionnaire data about teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their reported CA practices was matched and compared with the relevant data that came out of the observations and interviews. As the observations and interviews were aimed at in-depth investigation of teachers' beliefs about CA and their CA practices, the data generated from them was used to support, expand, interpret, and clarify those issues throughout the analysis process. The analysis involved interpretation of the results and making connections across various parts of data generated from all sources. Direct quotes from the interviews and evidences from teachers' assessment documents were used to support the analysis.

### **3.13 Quality issues**

Maximizing quality in research conduct depends to a great extent on quality measurement criteria and techniques undertaken by the researcher (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). These criteria influence the extent to which one can have confidence in the results. I highlight below some quality-related issues.

#### **3.13.1 The quality of the questionnaire**

Questionnaires are the most commonly used tool in research. As I explained in 3.7 and 3.8, different quality issues were considered in the design of the questionnaire in order to obtain good quality data; these are summarised in the following points:

- the design of the questionnaire reflected understanding from the literature
- consultation of experts was obtained
- piloting of the questionnaire was conducted
- incorporation of changes to questionnaire following the piloting.



### **3.13.2 The quality of the research design**

Robson (2002) points out that quality of research design depends to a considerable extent on the technical proficiency of the researcher. The technical proficiency includes the researcher's clear understanding and self-awareness of the topic being investigated and the researcher's skills in using the research methods (Robson, 2002). For this purpose, I attended two research methods courses prior to commencing my fieldwork. Those courses were very useful in developing my skills in using research methods and at the same time provided me with an in-depth understanding of different aspects of research conduct. Also, in this study the research was designed under the close supervision of my supervisors. They not only suggested strategies to use to ensure appropriateness in the methodology but they also raised numerous issues regarding the design of the research tools. They challenged the usability and validity of the research instruments and commented on several drafts until I reached the final design of my study. In addition, as stated earlier in this chapter, this research adopted a mixed-methods approach with method triangulation (see 3.3 above) that used questionnaire, observations, interviews, and documentary evidence. The use of the triangulation design helped the different types of methods (quantitative or qualitative) to complement each other: eliciting teachers' beliefs in the questionnaire, clarifying those beliefs in the follow-up interviews, following them up through the observations of specific classroom assessment practices and then working towards the cognitive bases of these practices through post-observation interviews.

### **3.13.3 Generalizability**

Generalizability describes the extent to which the findings derived from a study can be made useful to understand other similar situations beyond the specific research context (Bryman, 1988). As I involved all available Cycle 2 teachers of English in Dhahira in this study, the research findings can be applied to this particular group. In addition, I argued earlier in this study that this group of teachers in Dhahira have relatively similar pre-service and in-service training background and use the same curriculum and the same assessment system as other teachers in Oman. On this basis, the results of this study may also be regarded as having relevance for other teachers of English in Oman, more generally. I have also provided detailed analysis of the context which should enable readers to make inferences or judgments about the extent to which findings from this study are applicable to other contexts.

### **3.13.4 Reliability**

Dörnyei (2007, p.50) defines reliability as the "the extent to which our measurement instruments and procedures produce consistent results in a given population in different circumstances". Various strategies recommended by different researchers (Silverman, 2009; Cohen et al., 2000) were integrated in the design of the study to reduce the threats to reliability. During the design of the questionnaire, the issues of clarity of statements and avoidance of using ambiguous words were considered. In addition, the use of the closed statements provided data directly related to the issues suggested by the research instruments. Other ways for enhancing reliability were considered such as the use of tape-recording of interviews and observations and the use of original quotes and documentary evidences to support the research arguments which ensured the originality of the data used. Also, all the respondents were presented with the same standardized questions in the questionnaire, which had been carefully worded and piloted. Therefore, it was possible to obtain high reliability of responses. In addition to the above, in this study the Cronbach's alpha was used to check the reliability of the Likert-scale items in the questionnaire and the results I achieved satisfied the minimum levels recommended in the literature (see details in 3.8 earlier). In order to check the reliability of the observation schedule, it was piloted before it was used in the actual study. It was then modified according to the information revealed from the piloting. In addition, issues of increasing and enhancing reliability were considered when conducting interviews. As the observed practices of teachers showed some level of similarities, the questions I asked in each interview about teachers' practices were to some extent consistent. However, the wording of the questions varied from one interview to another according to the nature of teachers' behaviour and practices in the classroom. In addition, issues related to clarity of the questions and avoidance of leading questions were considered when conducting interviews. Also, the transcripts from the interviews were not edited in any way.

### **3.13.5 Validity**

Validity deals with the question of whether the measuring instrument measures what it was originally intended to measure (Cohen et al., 2000). Firstly, the validity of the research instruments was improved by consulting the relevant literature about instruments design and by refining the items of both the questionnaire and the observation schedule through the suggestions and comments I received from my supervisors and colleagues from the English Supervision Department. Also, through the

pilot-study, the items of the questionnaire and the observation schedule were further refined to meet the intended purpose. In addition, drawing on the relevant CA literature presented in Chapter 2 was useful here too. The triangulation process also contributed in improving validity, all the methods complemented each other and therefore any limitations of each method were thought of in the next method (e.g. validity of the questionnaire was improved by clarifying from teachers about their strong responses in the follow-up interviews.). Together, these methods allowed for a more complete analysis of the problem under investigation. I used semi-structured interviews: open and closed questions to elicit information at various stages of the interviews. Open-ended questions were useful in making the participants express themselves freely and suggest further issues which supported the findings. One type of validity that Maxwell (2005) identifies is descriptive validity. It refers to factual accuracy of the account as documented by the researcher. The major threat to valid description is the incorrectness and incompleteness of the researcher's description of what is heard and seen. Maxwell (2005) warns that if the description process is invalid, then any explanations or conclusions reached from these descriptions are doubtful. To maximize the accuracy of the data collected and therefore enhance the descriptive validity, the lessons I observed were audio-recorded digitally and follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify from teachers about things noticed in the observations. The validity of the interviews was also enhanced through the researcher's familiarity with the context which helped in seeking clarification from teachers about their beliefs and their CA practices.

Teachers' unwillingness to disclose information fully can be a threat to validity. This behaviour by the teachers was noticed during the interviews. However, their evasiveness during the interviews did not affect accessing into their beliefs because observing the teachers during their routine duties and then comparing their comments from the interviews with their actual practices allowed me to make sense of their assessment practices, their attitudes towards the CA change and the beliefs which motivated their actual practices.

In addition, validity was enhanced by presenting the data through providing a summary of teachers' stated beliefs reported in the questionnaire, descriptive details which portray each teacher's actual assessment practices and beliefs. Such structure of presentation of the data provides to readers a clearer picture of data analysis and helps them to see the

movement of the analysis from the observations of teachers' actual practices to the interviews and then to an analysis of both.

### **3.13.6 Role of the researcher**

Before I started my PhD study, I was working in the English supervision department at the DGE in Dhahira which is responsible for supervising teachers of English. As I discussed earlier in section 3.4.2, I was aware that my previous role as a supervisor for English teachers might have an effect on the data I collect. Therefore, to minimize the effect of my supervisory role, a number of strategies were followed. First, an overview about the study was attached to the questionnaire and also given to the teachers prior to the commencement of the classroom observations informing them about the nature of the study and my role as a researcher. Second, teachers were not required to provide their names when they filled in the questionnaire. The purpose of this was to encourage them to express their views more openly. Third, I dealt with the targeted teachers as a researcher conducting research as part of my study rather than as a supervisor of teachers. When I visited schools to distribute the questionnaire, I asked senior teachers to convey this message to teachers, inform them about the nature of the study, and confirm to them that all information gained from this questionnaire will be used confidentially and for research purposes only. Fourth, from my experience of working closely with the English teachers in the region, I think they are aware of the research culture as most of them have experiences of responding to questionnaires and participating in such studies. Also, most of them attended BA TESOL programme which should have made them confident to convey their views and get engaged in argumentative discussions. Finally, at the beginning of the observations and during the interviews, I also explained to participants my role as a researcher and I confirmed to them that the data is going to be used for research purposes only.

### **3.14 Ethical Considerations**

This section is intended to give an account of some of the ethical considerations related to the study. Pointing out the premises of informed consent, anonymity of participants and confidentiality, as the section reveals, reflects the concern of the study to get the participants' acceptance and protecting them from any possible mental or emotional harm.

It is worth mentioning here that in order to comply with the code of ethics for researchers approved by the University of Leeds, I applied to the Research Ethics Committee of the University and I received their ethical approval for conducting the main study (see Appendix 10).

### **3.14.1 Informed consent**

Permission to carry out the investigation is the first and most important step the researcher needs to seek at the initial stage of the research (Cohen et al., 2000). In Oman, the process of getting an approval for doing any educational research in schools should start from the MOE. I handed over the proposal of my study to the Technical Office of Studies and Development in the MOE and I received their permission to do the study in the Dhahira Governorate of the Sultanate during the academic year 2011/2012 (see Appendix 9) - a pilot study in the first semester and the main study in the second semester. According to the MOE permission, official consent was sent by the DGE in Dhahira to the participating schools.

After granting permission from the gatekeeper, the second ethical principle is the informed consent of the participants (Cohen et al., 2000): participants should have the appropriate information of the elements of the subject matter involved as to enable them to make informed decisions, have clear understanding of the nature of the research; they also should be given the right to refuse or take part on a voluntary basis (Homan, 2001). Permission for conducting classroom observations and post-lesson interviews was taken from both the principals of schools and classroom teachers. Teachers were provided with the details of the study and their permission to audio record the lessons during the observations was obtained (see Appendix 7 for the participant information sheet). Also, an overview about the observation schedule was given to the teachers observed prior to the commencement of the classroom observations. Informed consent was attached to the questionnaire in which teachers can choose whether (or not) to answer the questionnaire. Also, the participating teachers in both the observations and interviews signed a written consent for participation prior to the commencement of the classroom observations and interviews (see Appendix 8 for the participant consent).

### **3.14.2 Anonymity of participants and confidentiality**

The right to privacy has been considered when designing the questionnaire and observation schedule (Cohen et al., 2000). Teachers were informed that their privacy will

be protected and the information they provide should in no way reveal their identity. Also, as stated in the informed consent, research participants have the right to refuse to take part or to withdraw once the research has begun (Cohen et al., 2000). Research sites were guaranteed during the data collection, analysis, and interpretation (findings) that no reference will be made to the sites or their participants. 'Pseudonyms', described by Denscombe (2002, p. 181) were used as alternative and fictitious names to mask the true identity, to protect teachers' identities and the identity of the schools as well.

### **3.15 Presentation of the findings**

The presentation of the findings reflects the aim of this study to understand the relationship between teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practice and the factors influencing their CA practices. In this study, data is presented in five separate chapters. The first chapter presents the findings from the quantitative data and the remaining four chapters present the findings from the qualitative data.

Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the questionnaire. The data is analysed with reference to the research questions of this study. Overall, the organisation of the findings followed roughly the structure of the questionnaire. Key issues which emerged were highlighted and illustrated with evidence from the data. Summary tables were used to illustrate clearly teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their reported CA practices and then each pattern of the data presented in these tables is supported with the relevant qualitative data derived from teachers' own comments in the follow-up interviews on their responses in the questionnaire.

The qualitative data is structured into four case studies. I chose four case studies from the six I actually worked with for the following reasons. First, the decision was made partially on the belief that I had sufficient data from the quantitative part of the study and thus the time and space factors were considered due to that belief. Second, the data from the six teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practices showed some level of similarities between the six case studies; therefore, I chose the cases which provided more insight and clearer findings.

A separate chapter was provided for each of the four case studies where each teacher's practices and his/her rationales about these practices were presented. The structure of the four case studies followed the same format. Each case study started by a brief summary

of each teacher's beliefs about CA stated in the questionnaire and confirmed in the follow-up interviews (derived from the analysis of the quantitative data in Chapter 4). After the summary of the beliefs, I used the following structure all through the case study. I first identified an assessment behaviour by the teacher I observed in the lesson and I compared that behaviour with the relevant CA practice required by the CA guidelines. This was followed by a quote from the teachers' comments on that observed behaviour. I then proceeded to comment on the extent to which that behaviour by the teacher reflects his/her beliefs about CA and the practice recommended in the guidelines of CA.

### **3.16 Conclusion**

In this methodology chapter, I have presented different aspects of the research methodology of the study including the research questions, research design, the rationale for choosing the research design, the process of fieldwork, the procedures involved in the data collection and analysis and aspects related to quality issues of research. Also, an account of some of the ethical considerations related to the study has been presented. This description should assist readers by providing them with information about the design and the conduct of the study in order to make judgments about its quality. I now proceed to present the findings of this study in the five following chapters.

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

### 4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the analysis of the questionnaire and the follow-up interviews data. These data are analysed with reference to the research questions of this study. Key issues emerging are highlighted and illustrated with evidence from the data.

The chapter covers teachers' beliefs and their CA practices reported in the questionnaire and commented on in the follow-up interviews. The organization of this chapter follows mainly the structure of the questionnaire illustrated in Table 7. I start by presenting the main demographic features of the participants in summary tables. Then I also use summary tables to report teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their CA practices. The finding in each summary table is supported with the relevant qualitative data derived from teachers' own comments in the follow-up interviews on their responses in the questionnaire.

### 4.2 Demographic Information

The first section in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) included eight items asking teachers to provide their demographic details (e.g. gender and nationality), as well as their background information as it related to teaching, such as school type and experience in teaching English. A total of 237 (an 83.7% response rate) teachers responded to the questionnaire, 111 (46.8%) of which were males and 126 (53.2%) were females. The majority of the respondents are Omanis (187; 79.9%), while the remaining participants (47; 20.1%) are expatriates of different nationalities. As can be seen from Table 12, regarding the teachers' academic qualifications, the highest degree obtained for the vast majority of respondents was a Bachelor's degree.

**Table 12: Respondents' Highest Academic Qualifications**

Qualification	Diploma	BA	MA	Total
Frequency	2	229	5	236*
Percent	.8%	96.6%	2.1%	99%*

\*Throughout the chapter, where totals in the tables did not add up to 237, or 100%, this was due to missing data.

Table 13 shows that nearly half of the teachers had experience ranging from 10 years to 30 years (49.6%).



**Table 13: Participants' experience of teaching English**

Years of experience	Frequency	Percentage
0-5	75	31.8
6-10	44	18.6
11-15	50	21.2
16-20	35	14.8
21-25	20	8.5
26-30	8	3.4
30+	4	1.7
Total	236	100.0

Table 14 shows the study's broad coverage of cycle 2 teachers teaching Grades from 5-10. Such breadth of participants provides varied views of CA from various participants who had experience in teaching and using CA with a variety of Grades of cycle 2.

**Table 14: Cycle 2 Grades taught by the participants**

Grade	Frequency	Percentage
5	39	16.5
6	28	11.8
7	30	12.7
8	37	15.6
9	32	13.5
10	65	27.4
Total	232	97.9

For the number of students in the classroom, Table 15 indicates that almost 87% of the teachers had 25 learners or more in their classes.

**Table 15: The number of learners in the classroom**

Number of learners	Frequency	Percentage
10 or below	3	1.3
11-15	6	2.5

16-20	22	9.3
21-25	54	22.8
+25	152	64.1
Total	237	100.0

### 4.3 Demographic description of the qualitative stage participants

Six participants were chosen for the qualitative stage of the study according to their responses to the questionnaire (see the rationale for the selection in 3.10.2). Table 16 presents some of their demographic characteristics. Their experience varied from 1 year to 21 years in teaching. Five teachers had more than 20 learners in their classes, while only one participant (Badar) had nine learners. Two of them had larger classes of more than 30 learners. Muhanad and Alwaleed taught only one level, whereas Hussam and Badar taught three levels and Fukhri and Alzahra two levels. Apart from Hussam, all of them attended CA training. Muhanad and Fukhri expressed positive attitudes about that training whereas Alzahra thought it was only a brief explanation of marks distributions.

**Table 16: Demographic description of the second stage participants**

Name	Gender	Nationality	Qualification	Years of experience	Grades taught	Number of learners	Type of school	Location of school	CA training experiences
Muhanad	M	Omani	BA	7	10	28	Combined (Cycle 2 & post basic)	Rural	Attended workshops regarding the use of CA where they gave us a clear idea about using it
Hussam	M	Omani	BA	1	8,9&11	36	Combined (Cycle 2& post basic)	Rural	No training

Badar	M	Omani	BA	7	7,9&11	9	Combined (Cycle 2& post basic)	urban	How to use CA tools and methods
Fukhri	M	Non- Omani	BA	19	8&11	27	Combined (Cycle 2& post basic)	urban	They were very useful. I got some new ideas from the teachers and I tried to apply them in my class
Alwaleed	M	Omani	BA	21	8	32	Cycle 2	urban	Using different ways and methods in CA
Alzahra	F	Omani	BA	6	8&12	22	Combined (Cycle 2 & post basic)	urban	Brief explanations of marks distribution and portfolios during Cycle 2 course

#### 4.4 Teachers' beliefs about assessment

The second section of the questionnaire consists of 20 statements, as explained in 3.10.2, which asked teachers about their beliefs with regard to the purposes, process, and uses of assessment. The majority of the English teachers who participated in the quantitative part of this study reported strong positive beliefs about CA. Generally speaking, as Table 17 shows, they agreed strongly with statements in the questionnaire referring to CA-type practices (mean=4.2) more than the statements about the traditional assessment (TA) practices (mean=3.4) (though there was no direct reference to CA in the statements nor to TA).

**Table 17: Mean score of CA and TA**

	CA mean score	TA mean score
Teachers' beliefs about assessment	4.2	3.4

For the purpose of presenting the findings, the 20 statements were reorganized into three groups: purposes of assessment, process of assessment, and uses of assessment. In the interviews, teachers also justified their high response of a particular purpose, process, or use of assessment. The following section reports the results of the second section of the questionnaire regarding teachers' beliefs about purposes, process, and uses of assessment supplemented by qualitative data deriving from the follow-up questions in the interviews.

#### **4.4.1 Teachers' beliefs about purposes of assessment**

Five statements in section two of the questionnaire asked teachers about their beliefs about the purposes of assessment. The statements are listed in descending order according to the mean scores of each statement. Generally speaking, high mean scores, as shown in Table 18, suggest that teacher's value all the assessment purposes listed. However, the assessment purpose of understanding learners' progress received the highest mean scores, while the purposes of evaluating teachers' effectiveness and determining learners' final grades received the lowest.

**Table 18: Teachers' beliefs about purposes of assessment**

Statements	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
		%	%	%	%	%	
		1	2	3	4	5	
The main aim of assessment is understanding learners' progress.	234	2.5	2.1	7.2	52.3	34.6	4.20

Focusing on learners' final achievements is an important function of assessment.	230	2.5	11.8	10.1	48.1	24.5	3.83
Ranking learners is an important function of assessment.	231	.8	7.2	24.5	52.3	12.7	3.73
An important aim of assessment is evaluating teachers' effectiveness.	233	5.9	21.1	25.7	38.8	6.8	3.20
The main aim of assessment is determining learners' final grades.	236	5.5	21.1	27.0	38.0	8.0	3.20

The following sub-sections present some observations drawn from Table 18 and teachers' justifications for their high preference of these purposes of assessment, which provide insight into the meanings teachers assigned to these purposes.

#### 4.4.1.1 Understanding learners' progress

Table 18 shows that the aim of understanding learners' progress received the highest mean score (4.20). In the interviews, the six teachers who participated in the follow-up interviews justified their strong agreement with this purpose of assessment. For example, Hussam reported that, considering this purpose helps in noticing learners' progress overtime so as to arrive at a clear understanding of their achievement and their learning difficulties:

O. Ok, let's talk about the questionnaire part, you agreed with the first statement in the questionnaire about using assessment for the purpose of understanding learners' progress; would you explain this more for me?

H. If you don't assess students' progress, so what is the purpose of assessment? Assessment is to notice students' progress. Today, for example, if you assess them in reading, you are assessing reading today; if you give them a task and the student get 2 out of 5, for example, next time if he gets 3 out of 5 and in the next lesson he gets 5 out of 5, this a good progress, so by that we can identify that this student is progressing and the opposite, if the student gets 5 out of 5 in the first task but next time his marks are decreasing, 5 then 4 then 3, this can show us that this student has some difficulties. So, we know that student needs more attention and we have to look for the reasons. (H1, 27:34\*)

\*Throughout the analysis chapters these codes refer to the interviewee's initials, the number of the interview and the time of the quote (e.g. H=Hussam, 1=interview No.1, 27:34=time of utterance).

Another teacher, Muhanad, thought that CA is crucial for understanding learners' progress as it shows the results of their achievements of the learning outcomes. He believed that assessment and teaching go together so through CA the teacher can identify whether learners are progressing or not:

O. You strongly agreed with first statement in the questionnaire about using assessment for the purpose of understanding learners' progress; would you explain this more for me?

M. Actually if you look at assessment, the assessment has many objectives and our objectives, the main objectives we have in our teaching is to see that learner's, actually, outcomes are improving. Let's say, they have kind of problems with skills, maybe reading and writing and you are putting the assessment with other activities; if the assessment is going on and you are teaching well, you will see that students are progressing very well. But if the teaching and the assessment are not working together, you will not see the outcomes of students learning. For that reason, I think the assessment actually creates a major issue regarding the students learning. For that reason, I think it's a very crucial thing in understanding learning progress. (M1, 10:10)

Hence, using assessment for the purpose of understanding learners' progress is highly valuable to these teachers of English because they see it as a means for noticing learners' progress in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of their learning and at the same time identifying their learning difficulties.

#### **4.4.1.2 Focusing on learners' final achievement**

As Table 18 shows, the purposes of focusing on learners' final achievement (mean = 3.83) and ranking learners (mean = 3.73) received relatively high mean scores. This seems relevant in the Omani context as arriving at learners' final achievement is a cumulative process in which both CA and final exam contribute to learners final grades. Badar was the only teacher who responded strongly to the above statements in the questionnaire from the six participants of the follow-up interviews. He did not seem to see any distinction between the two aims of assessment, understanding learners' progress and focusing on learners' final achievement and he thought that they complement each other.

B. Yeah, because at the beginning of the semester you need to have evidence of students', for example, writing, let's say writing, evaluative

writing. During the semester, you ask them again and again to do work to check and see their progress: if they are changing or if they still have the same problems. So, it's a good way to know if they are progressing or not.

O. So you are not with final, I mean checking final achievement of students?

B. I am with both, I mean you want to achieve something at the end, so you start giving them things such as tasks and try to check their tasks and see if they are going to achieve what you want them to achieve at the end. So, following-up their progress gives you, tells you where they are. Are they progressing or just at the same point when they started the semester. (B2, 21:38)

#### **4.4.1.3 Evaluating teachers' effectiveness.**

Using assessment for the purpose of evaluating teachers' effectiveness seems still recognised by teachers (mean score: 3.2). However, only two teachers from the six participants of the follow-up interviews agreed strongly with this statement in the questionnaire. During the interviews, I asked them to clarify their strong responses. Alzahra responded in this way:

O. Also, this statement about evaluating teachers' effectiveness; do you believe that assessment should be a way to evaluate teachers' effectiveness?

A. Yes, why not to evaluate teachers' effectiveness because some teachers are careless to finish the curriculum and to give the students all the materials they need to get. I mean by assessment here is final exams. (Az1, 10:05)

Alzahra confirmed here that learners' results from the final exams should be used for evaluating teachers' effectiveness.

However, Fuhri clarified his high response to the same statement in this way:

O. Now I will try to focus on some areas you covered in the questionnaire? This is something attracted my attention, actually you agreed strongly with the statement about using assessment for evaluating teachers' effectiveness?

F. Yeah, evaluation, or assessment helped me a lot to discover myself or improve myself as a teacher. Every time, every period and every class, I discover that there is something I should do, I can do, I should try to do. I try and sometimes I succeed and sometimes I fail. This continuous assessment of myself can improve my performance as a teacher. (F2, 32:52)

Fuhri did not seem to be talking about the CA of learners here. It seemed that he misinterpreted the statement.

Collectively, to summarise teachers' justifications of their strong responses to the statements in Table 18, even though some of the six teachers show some level of agreement with other purposes of assessment, all of them confirm what the majority of teachers in this study reported in questionnaire of strong belief about the assessment purpose of understanding learners' progress.

Having presented the data about teachers' beliefs about purposes of assessment, the next section covers the beliefs about the process of assessment.

#### 4.4.2 Teachers' beliefs about the process of assessment

Table 19 presents the finding regarding teachers' beliefs about the process of assessment.

**Table 19: Teachers' beliefs about the process of assessment**

Statements	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Mode
		1	2	3	4	5		
		%	%	%	%	%		
It is important that assessment take place continuously throughout the year.	235	1.7	1.7	5.1	36.7	54	4.41	5
Learners need to be involved in the process of assessment.	235	1.7	5.1	9.7	47.3	35.4	4.12	4
Teachers need to take full control of the assessment process.	237	2.5	15.2	14.8	42.2	25.3	3.73	4
Assessment is best organized formally at dates and at times previously decided.	236	1.7	13.5	17.7	51.9	14.8	3.65	4
Exams should be produced for all regions by the Ministry of Education.	234	12.7	26.2	13.1	27.8	19	3.15	4

Table 19 shows that teachers regarded CA approaches highly. The first and the second highest mean scores were received by statements which refer to the ongoing process of assessment (mean = 4.41) and involvement of learners in the process of assessment



(mean = 4.12), both of which are fundamental to the CA approach. The other approaches which refer to traditional assessment were given less emphasises by the teachers, though they seem still have some importance for teachers as the mean scores of these processes are arranged between 3.73 to 3.15.

The six teachers who participated in the follow-up interviews also shared the strong positive beliefs about CA approaches. Regarding the statement about the continuous nature of assessment, teachers were asked to justify their high responses to this statement.

Fukhri responded in various ways:

O. Another statement: it is important that assessment take place continuously all through the year. Why do you feel this is very important from your point of view?

F. As I told you, it will give you many chances to evaluate your students and your curriculum. It gives many chances to your students to participate, to do well, and to give the chance if he fails once, he can succeed another time. He is assessed everyday so he should work hard. If the teacher had a bad impression the first time, he can correct that bad impression. The students will feel with hope to do or to work. (F2, 33:15)

Fukhri valued CA because its ongoing process provides learners with ample opportunities to improve their performance and gain better results. He also added that CA could motivate learners to work hard since they know that they are assessed continuously.

Likewise, Muhanad said:

O. So, in your opinion, why is it important for assessment to take place continuously throughout the year? You gave a very high response to this statement in the questionnaire.

M. Because we have, let's say, four month in each semester; if we only check the students' progress in one month and then we don't care about the other month, let's say, we are putting a gap between the two semesters and also between the skills their self. As you know, the curriculum here contains lots of things to do. Maybe they are recycled, yes, but also they are new to the students. So, we have to focus on different kind of dates. And also the students, as you know, are emotional: sometimes, maybe, he has problems; sometimes he is not focusing because of health problems. So, we have to measure him or to see him all through the whole year not only by the end of semester or by the end of the year.

O. Yeah. So, you think it is important to observe them or assess them continuously ...?

M. ...continuously... daily...I think it is very important to do it daily actually. (M1, 8:48)

Muhanad stressed the point that CA provides opportunities for learners to compensate for earlier weaknesses during the assessment process and so increases the fairness of the assessment. Moreover, he explained a benefit of the ongoing process of CA in that it closes any gap in assessment of learners' progress.

Hussam also emphasised the point that CA can motivate learners to work continuously:

O. OK, also, in your opinion, why it is important for assessment to take place continuously throughout the year? Not just to assess students by the end of the unit, for example, or by the end of one month? Why should it be conducted continuously?

H. For example, if you tell the students that after unit one, we are going to have a test, they will not work during the whole unit, they will take their time but the day before the exam they will work hard. This is not good because what comes quickly goes quickly. I mean here, they will not make efforts during the unit; they will only study just for that particular task. If you tell them that by the end of semester you will give them a task, they will not make efforts during the whole semester, they will focus only on the final task, and that is not good. They will not improve themselves. (H1 25:34)

Another frequent comment refers to the way that CA can increase learners' motivation and help in understanding learners' progress by Badar as he stated:

O. Yeah, in the questionnaire you strongly agreed with using assessment continuously all through the year, why you believe so strongly about that?

B. Because I want students to be involved in every lesson, so they know that they have to work the whole year, not only at the end of the year. So every time I give them tasks, homework, just to improve their performance, so I am assessing them continuously so to know if they are progressing or not and these tasks focus on their progress. If you give them tasks, sure they are going to learn more. So that's why I give them tasks and activities to do. (B2 18:32)

Interestingly, as it is clear from the above quotes, one frequent comment repeated by most teachers is that CA, as an assessment tool, could be more effective in assessing learners than assessing them only at the end of the learning process. Teachers attributed their preference of CA to its ongoing process, which can allow teachers to follow up learners' progress continuously.

With regard to the second statement in Table 19 about involving learners in the process of assessment, teachers were also asked to provide justifications for their strong preference of this aspect of CA. I asked Hussam about this:

O. You strongly agreed with the statement about involving learners in the process of assessment? Why do you think it is important to involve students in the process of assessment? That is not the teacher takes full control of assessment, you are giving students more chance to assess themselves.

H. Yes, first of all, they will feel free during the assessment. You, for example, give them a task and after the task you ask them to exchange their papers. The students will feel more comfortable and the students will know what their mistakes are. So if I have my partners' task, I can identify his mistakes, and I can avoid them, I will not do these mistakes in the future. So by this way they feel free, more comfortable; this is a very important point. If you are assessing them and you make them feel that you are taking control of assessment, the students will feel uncomfortable and will feel afraid during the lesson. I think that is not good for the students. (H1, 21:43)

Hussam referred to peer assessment; but he felt that the notion of involving learners in the process of assessment is important to increase learners' awareness of their weaknesses and to provide learners with a comfortable and pressure-free environment of assessment.

I asked Muhanad about his strong response to the same statement:

O. Ok, you strongly agreed with the statement about involving learners in the process of assessment; why do you think it is important to involve students in the process of assessment? Involving the students?

M. You mean engaging them, putting them in .....?

O. I mean involving students, asking, giving them more role in assessing themselves; like... you know about self-assessment? Like portfolios... so....?

M. This one (self-assessment), we use very much actually, but in Grade 10 we use little than the other classes. In other classes we can give them, let's say, a short quiz, that is informal of course, and we can ask students to mark this quiz rather than mark it by the teacher. Another thing that you can ask students to put themselves into groups and one student can be the teacher and he can assess them and he decides which group is activating very well or which group is the good one or not. So once you put the students in that place, you will give him an idea how the teacher is assessing us and how he can see us.

Also in the curriculum itself, in each theme students have questionnaires to assess themselves: what did you learn. So this is the idea that they can express and they can talk about themselves and make good, let's say, self-evaluation; in a good way, not only providing only fake information, not correct information about themselves. (M1, 5:60)

Muhanad expressed his preference in involving learners in the process of assessment and he explained that it gives them the chance to experience the role of the assessor. Also, he added that it is a means of self-evaluation in which learners can have accurate information about their learning.

Badar said that self-assessment helps learners to improve the quality of their work. However, he stated that he did not do self-assessment regularly with his learners:

O. Ok, another statement, learners need to be involved in the process of assessment. In what ways? How can we involve them in the process of assessment?

B. Sometimes you ask them to check their work to see if they can improve it, even in writing, sometimes you ask them to write something and then revise it and ask their peers to check it. I don't actually do this one, I don't do it, but I agree with it.

O. So you don't do it?

B. Sometimes, I don't mean I am doing this like a regular work.  
(B2, 19:21)

Regarding the statement about teachers taking full control of assessment (see Table 19), Alzahra was the only teacher who responded strongly to this statement, however she seemed to have misinterpreted it:

O. This statement: teachers should take full control of assessment; I mean by this you are not allowing your students to take part in the process of assessment, for example, using self-assessment, questionnaires whatever technique you use to make students assess themselves; taking the control from the students and not allowing them to assess themselves.

A. You mean by 'control' that you do all things yourself?

O. yeah, yourself

A. I thought 'control' means that teacher should follow-up the students in their assessment.

O. So you misunderstood the word 'control'? (Az1, 8:10)

Another teacher, Fukhri also misunderstood the statement:

O. Another statement, teacher should take full control of the assessment process. Why is this very important for you?

F. Again?

O. Teachers should take full control of assessment, you know about full control?

M. yeah, yeah

O. You are doing everything about assessment you are not allowing students to do anything. So, you said you agree with this statement?

F. (reads the statement again and he showed that he wants to change his response)

O. You don't agree with this? You want to change it?

F. Yeah.

O. Where do you want to put it?

F. I disagree.

O. you disagree

F. yeah (F2, 31:40)

The above quotes suggest that both teachers misinterpreted the word 'control' in the statement (see Table 19). This may suggest that the high mean score for this statement in the questionnaire (mean = 3.73) might be due to teachers' misinterpretation of the statement.

In summary, the teachers confirmed here what is reported in Table 19 regarding strong beliefs about the approaches to CA.

#### 4.4.3 Teachers' beliefs about the uses of assessment

Table 20 presents the finding regarding teachers' beliefs about the uses of assessment.

**Table 20: Teachers' beliefs about the uses of assessment**

Statements	N	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Mode
		1	2	3	4	5		
		%	%	%	%	%		
Providing regular feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment.	237	1.7	2.1	5.5	39.7	51.1	4.36	5
Assessment needs to be based on a variety of assessment methods.	236	.8	1.7	9.7	44.3	43	4.28	4

Providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress is an important aspect of assessment.	237	.4	2.5	8	48.5	40.5	4.26	4
It is important for learners to know the criteria they are assessed against.	234	1.3	3.4	11.8	35	47.3	4.25	5
Teachers should emphasize test-taking strategies in the class to prepare learners for the final exam.	236	1.3	4.2	9.3	57.4	27.4	4.06	4
Assessment needs to be based on continuous observations of learners' progress.	235	25	3.8	11	51.9	30	4.04	4
Teachers need to use the assessment results to improve their teaching.	236	1.7	9.3	16	45.6	27	3.87	4
Remedying learners' weakness is an important aspect of assessment.	233	.4	8.9	18.1	48.5	22.4	3.85	4
Assessment is best conducted at the end of learning process.	233	7.6	21.5	17.7	43.5	9.7	3.26	4
One exam at the end of the year is the best way to assess learners.	235	35.4	37.6	10.1	11.4	4.6	2.11	2

Table 20 shows that the assessment practices that related to CA were highly valued by teachers. The first seven highest mean scores ranging from 4.36 to 3.85 reflect high appreciation by teachers of those CA practices. On the contrary, assessing at the end of learning process (Mean = 3.26) and by one exam (Mean = 2.11) received the lowest mean scores which demonstrate less appreciation of these assessment methods. However, it is interesting to see that even for teachers who valued CA uses, preparing learners for the final exam is among the practices with a relatively high value (mean = 4.06). This may suggest that teachers who are not in favour of a final exam may still feel a responsibility to help their learners pass it.

In the following sub-sections, I cite teachers' responses to the follow-up questions in which teachers were asked to justify why they valued some particular practices of assessment so highly. I only focus on the statements for which teachers were asked to comment on.

#### **4.4.3.1 Beliefs about providing regular feedback to learners**

With regard to providing regular feedback to learners on their progress (using the information gathered through CA), teachers in the interviews confirmed their strong beliefs about this practice. For example, Hussam believed that feedback is very important because it regularly informs learners about their actual progress and therefore makes them motivated all the time:

O. Why do you think providing feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment? You gave a very high response to this issue.

H. yes, yes I know. I talk to students. For example, yesterday I talked to a student and I told him that his level is getting up, you have to work harder and this and this can convince him to work harder. Some students' level is going down, when I told them that you have to pay attention to their learning at all, they care more, pay more attention and try to improve. Also, they will ask someone to help them. I know that some parents came here at the beginning of semester and talked to us about their sons and we told them that, for example, that this student is not very good during the lesson. So, this made the student work harder. Some students, since then (since given feedback) are improving their skills, they are preparing the lessons, they are asking about the next lesson, what will be in the next lesson?

O. sorry for interruption, is this because of your feedback...?

H. yes, yes, because of the feedback they know what their real level is. So, if I know that I am, for an example, a good student, I would like to be very good or an excellent student, so I will work harder. If my teacher told, for example, that I am weak and I have to make more efforts, I'll study harder and I'll try to improve myself, so feedback is very important. (H1, 16:07)

Fukhri also confirmed his strong belief that providing regular feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment. He provided similar reasons like those mentioned by Hussam:

O. OK, another statement: providing regular feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment. Regular feedback, why is it so important for you? You strongly agreed with this statement? How can regular feedback help with assessment?

F. Yeah, feedback is very important for students. They can see the results of their work. They can see the importance of their performance, if they did well or not. So, feedback is a main part of assessment for both the teacher and students themselves. So, I give my students feedback regularly and I feel that they get what I need them to do. (F2, 30:50)

#### **4.4.3.2 Beliefs about using a variety of assessment methods**

The majority of teachers in the interviews stated that assessment should be based on a variety of assessment methods. For example, Hussam was asked to justify his high response to the statement in the questionnaire (see the second statement in Table 20), he responded in this way:

O. Why do you think assessment should be based on a variety of assessment methods? Why do think you need to do many different techniques to assess students?

H. I think, you focus, for example, on observing students during the class, some students will do some tasks in the skills book, for example, at home and will come to only tell the answers, so we cannot judge just from their participation in the classroom. The second point that if we have, for example, self-assessment, within some periods you have to make students assess their progress, we cannot rely only on their participation in the classroom because as I told you some will get answers from home, some will get answers from classmates and that will be not their answers, this not good. By doing tasks, for example, in the classroom, this is a good way to show that a student has written his own answers, not his brothers and sisters. So focusing on tasks only is not good, focusing on participation only is not good. You have to verify to show the real progress of the student.

O. OK, so you are not just using one aspect of assessment, one particular technique, you are using different techniques to assess your students?

H. Yes, yes, because I need to verify this because I need to know the real progress of the students. (H1, 7:40)

Also, Alzahra in her comments about CA expressed a feeling that CA has the advantage of including a variety of assessment methods, which make CA more beneficial for learners than final exam:

CA is better because you don't know the circumstances in the final exam. CA has many skills, for example, speaking, reading, and many ways to assess these skills; for example, here in speaking: presentations and interactions. If they don't do well in presentation, I can give them marks in participations. Also, I told them, for example, the same thing in reading: they have reading at home and reading in the class, so if they don't do well in reading in the class, they can compensate in the reading at home. So this variety can help them to collect as much marks



as they can and also can help them meet different things, different books, different information, different vocabulary, and different grammar from what they have done in the school. For example, they read in books independent reading. So I think it (CA) has a variety, so the students can collect many marks. But, the final exam just has questions and the students have to answer them by doing one thing is studying the book. (Az1 13:52)

The quotes above imply that the teachers valued the variety of assessment techniques because it allows for a clearer picture of learners' attainments and also this variety will provide more opportunities for learners to improve their achievements and experience more learning skills.

#### **4.4.3.3 Beliefs about providing feedback to parents**

Teachers in the interviews commented on their strong response in the questionnaire regarding 'providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress is an important aspect of assessment'. They stated that it is an important aspect of assessment but most of them reported that they are facing difficulties to do this due to lack of cooperation from parents and lack of time. For example, Alzahra stated that she provides feedback to parents when there is a serious problem and this worked with her but she had the obstacle of lack of time to do it regularly:

O. Providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress is an important aspect of assessment; of course this is a statement in the questionnaire and you strongly agreed with it, but in real practice, do you have time or access to parents to provide them with feedback on their children progress?

A. To do it myself for them for example?

O. Yeah to do it yourself, for example, to call a mother or a father and ..

A. If it is a very serious problem, yes I do this thing and sometimes I call their parents and sometimes I send them (students) to the social affairs specialist, so it works with me a lot(giving feedback to parents).

O. but do you do it regularly (providing feedback to parents on their children's progress)?

A. Here in school they send messages to parents but really I don't have time.

O. Ok, so it is always about time, you don't have time. You strongly agreed with it (giving feedback to parents) and you want to do it but...

A. I don't have time, really. We want to do a lot of things but we don't have time. (Az2, 6:10)

Similarly, Fukhri said:

O. Ok, about providing regular feedback to parents, do you believe in this?

F. It is very important but it is not available here in our school.

O. Does this create kind of problems to you as you don't have this access to parents to talk to them about their children?

F. Yes, if the student feels that his parents are careful about him and interested in his performance, he will feel that he should do well and participate in the class. If I ask a student to tell his father that I want to see him and I realize that his parents don't care about his performance, the student himself will feel careless about the subject and about his performance. So, parents' visits to our school are very important because it gives the teacher and the student more responsibility to do well. (F2, 21:57)

Muhanad was asked about his strong agreement with providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress. He stressed the fact that following learners' progress should be done through cooperation between the teacher and parents:

O. One last question about the questionnaire, you strongly agreed with the statement about providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress, why do you think this is very important?

M. Both school and family make an important contribution to the educational process, if we are doing our best here and we are following up the students here and when they go to the house they don't find the same follow-up, maybe we will not reach a good point in students' learning. There will be a gap. Last year we had a diagnostic exam for students and when we sent letters to parents informing them about their students' performance, the good points, and the bad points, unfortunately, only 5 or less than 10 fathers came to school to discuss their children's results with us. (M2, 12:49)

Similarly, Badar commented on the advantage of CA in providing a clear picture about learners' progress, which in turn helps teachers provide parents with sufficient information about their children:

O. What about parents when parents come to school? Does assessment help you to give feedback to parents about their children progress?

B. Yeah, sure. Sometimes we have some parents who come to ask about their children progress; I give them everything they want to know, even if they ask about the handwriting, homework, or about their children participation in the class. I know whose student can answer this question and those students who can't answer it, so if someone come and ask about a particular student to give feedback, I can give

everything about him: his level in speaking, writing, everything. I have clear idea about my students. (B1, 2:43)

#### 4.4.3.4 Beliefs about emphasizing test taking strategies

As is the case from the questionnaire results (see Table 20), teachers in the interviews also felt that they have to emphasize test-taking strategies in the class to prepare learners for the final exam. As presented in 4.4.2, teachers opposed to the use of final exams as the only form of assessment, however, they stated here that they have to follow the requirements of these exams. They said that they need to sometimes adapt their lessons or the teaching materials in order to meet such requirements. For example, I asked Fukhri about this:

O. Also, about test-taking strategies, I saw you here (in the questionnaire), you put 'agree', that you need to emphasize on test taking strategies in the class to prepare learners for the final exam?

F. I discovered that there is a gap between the final exams and the course book, which didn't give my students any practice on the items and questions of the final exam. They (course books) give them different things. They insist in many things that are not related to the final exams. So if you design tests similar to the final exam and give them regularly in the class, I think the students will be ready and confident of their performance in the final exam.

O. Do you give it much of your lesson time?

F. I did it once a week. Sometimes I give 'writing' similar to the final exam, sometimes 'grammar', sometimes 'vocab', to prepare them for the final exam. It is not found in the course book. (F2, 23:45)

Similarly, Muhanad said

O. Ok, is practicing for the final exam is a concern for you?

M. In such Grade (Grade 10) yeah it's a concern because, as you know, when we reach this limit of teaching students we have only less than four months to prepare the students for the final exam. So we are doing the teaching and also on the other side we put in mind that we are practicing similar questions that they will face in the exam. (M2, 24:03)

Although teachers seemed in favour of CA more than final exams (as presented in 4.4.2), the quotes above imply that they had to teach and assess the specific objectives which would be covered on the upcoming final exam. Also, the teachers had to constantly shift directions of their teaching and assessing to prepare their learners for the final exams.

Collectively, as is the case from the questionnaire results (see Table 20), a recurrent theme in the follow-up interviews was that teachers valued the practices of CA and did not see the final exam as a valuable means of assessment.

#### 4.5 Teachers' understanding of CA

Section 3 of the questionnaire focused on teachers' understanding of CA by asking them to identify whether the assessment practices, listed in Table 21 below, were 'CA', 'Not CA' and 'Not sure'. The findings for this section are summarized in Table 21, which gives the percentage of teachers selecting each of the three possible ratings for each assessment practice. The responses are listed in descending order according to the percentage of teachers who indicated that the assessment practice was 'CA'.

**Table 21: Teachers' understanding of CA**

Statements	N	CA	Not CA	Not Sure	Mode
		% 1	% 2	% 3	
Observing learners' performance during everyday classroom teaching.	235	89	5.9	4.2	1
Recording learners' progress during normal classroom teaching.	230	79.9	9.7	8.9	1
Providing regular feedback to learners on their progress.	233	74.7	13.9	9.7	1
Making an on-going collection of work done by the learner.	231	65.4	14.8	17.3	1
Allowing learners to evaluate their own performance regularly.	235	61.2	22.4	15.6	1
Using a variety of assessment methods to evaluate learners' progress.	235	61.2	22.4	15.6	1
Using assessment results to improve teaching.	234	51.5	21.5	24.5	1
Using assessment tasks that are similar to everyday life.	223	48.5	19.0	30.8	1
Awarding marks to learners according to their performance in one exam.	232	21.5	61.2	15.5	2

Dedicating lots of class time to training learners for the end year exam.	234	15.2	57.4	26.2	2
Relying on one test at the end of the year.	234	11.4	78.5	8.9	2

As Table 21 shows, the practices from 1 - 8 were most highly rated by the teachers as CA, all of which are fundamental to the CA approach. The other three practices that refer to traditional assessment were the least rated as CA. This reflects an awareness of CA practices by the teachers. Although 51.5% of teachers recognized using results to improve learning as a practice of CA and only three of the CA items had over 75% agreement, it seems that teachers still see a clear distinction between CA practices and traditional assessment practices. The data provides evidence that the participants are quite aware of the concept of CA and its uses.

#### **4.6 Teachers' CA practices**

The fourth section in the questionnaire focused on teachers' CA practices. It asked teachers to firstly indicate whether they are using CA. It then requested them to provide up to three examples of their CA practices if they say that they are using CA. If not, teachers were asked to specify the factors or reasons for not using CA in their classrooms. Also, teachers were asked whether they attended any training sessions/courses related to CA and to name the sessions/courses they attended.

The following sub-sections report the data of the questions in section four of the questionnaire.

##### **4.6.1 Teachers' use of CA**

Regarding the 'Yes' and 'No' question asking teachers to indicate whether they are using CA, Table 22 shows that a very high percentage of teachers (96.7) said that they use CA. The high 'YES' responses reflect a wide reported use of CA among the English teachers of Cycle 2 schools.

**Table 22: Teachers' use of CA**

Response	Frequency	Percent
YES	229	96.6
NO	3	1.3

Total	232	97.9
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#### 4.6.2 Examples of CA practices

In the questionnaire teachers who reported using CA, were asked to provide up to three examples of their CA practices. 153 teachers provided three examples, 38 mentioned two, 12 provided one, while 29 teachers gave no responses. Table 23 summarizes the examples of practices mentioned by teachers. The practices are listed in descending order according to how frequently they were mentioned by teachers. Generally speaking, as Table 23 shows, the teachers reported use of a variety of CA techniques and tools. Assessing by short tests and class-based assessment were reported as predominant CA practices. Other quite frequent practices were regular observation and assessing daily participation. However, the large gap between the frequency of latter practices and the high frequency of short quizzes (110) indicates teachers' strong preference for the tools which require awarding marks more than the ones which require writing regular notes about learners performance. Moreover, although giving regular feedback to learners about their performance is a fundamental practice of CA, it was one of the least mentioned practices by the teachers. This indicates a low formative function of CA by the teachers (see also using assessment result to improve/inform teaching). In addition, although they were given a low frequency (20), final exams were reported by the teachers as CA tools. Interestingly, the assessment practices, which require involving learners in the assessment process (self-assessment and peer-assessment), were the least mentioned ones by the teacher.

**Table 23: Examples of CA practices**

CA practices	Frequency*
Short quizzes	110
Assessing through activities and tasks during the lesson	97
Regular/daily observations	52
Assessing daily participation	51
Providing feedback to learners on their progress	28
Homework	25
Presentations	24
Portfolios	22
Assessing by exams/tests/tasks at the end of the units/month/semesters	20
Non class-based assessment/assignment/research/projects	18

Recording/ taking notes of learners progress	14
Doing remedial plans	8
Using a variety of assessment methods	8
Independent reading/ generic tasks	8
Tracking learners' performance during the semester	6
Using assessment result to improve/inform teaching	4
Prepare for final exams	4
Self-assessment	3
Peer-assessment	2
Use mark register	2
Comparing learners marks	2

\* The frequencies of these practices were first calculated using the "find" function in word processor together with manual highlighting and calculation. A further level of analysis was then applied to categorize these further.

The teachers in the interviews were asked to comment on the examples of CA they provided. For example, Hussam was asked about the practice of recording learners' progress:

O. One of the examples you gave of your CA practices is recording learners' progress during classroom teaching. Do you think that using CA records is necessary during the process of assessment?

H. Yes, I think, I don't do it in a written way, I observe them and I can, as I told you before, I can understand and I can know that this student is progressing and this student is not. So this is important because if the student is not progressing, you have to work harder and you have to verify the activities and the tasks and you have to change your way of teaching. This can help the students improve their skills, so it is important to record to understand if their level is increasing or decreasing, therefore, you can formulate your way of teaching.

Hussam's comments here contradict what he reported in the questionnaire regarding keeping records of CA. Although keeping records of learners' CA is a fundamental CA practice (see 1.4), Hussam stated that he did not write notes of learners' CA. This is also clear from Table 23 as it indicates that keeping record of CA was not a frequent practice by the teachers. Hussam appears here aware of the importance of this practice as he indicated that recording information about learners' CA helps in understanding of their learning and thus in evaluating the effectiveness of his teaching.

I asked Alzahra about the example of CA that she mentioned in the questionnaire:

O. "Acknowledging grammar and vocabulary" you mentioned this in your CA practices part of the questionnaire but I didn't get what you mean?

A. It means to learn (students learn) new vocabulary and new grammar rules and just, for example, they (students) have to put them in their dictionaries at the end of their exercise book, so I notice the progress of using these new vocabularies.

O. So do you follow it up regularly?

A. Yeah, and some of my students really have great improvement in using advanced vocabulary in their speaking even and also in writing.....for example, in each unit we have many new words and I told them (the students) today or tomorrow you are going to have a vocabulary test in the words you have learned in unit one. Then, they go and study the words in their dictionaries and do the exam.  
(Az2, 4:25)

As Table 23 shows, assessing by short quizzes is the most frequent CA practice reported by teachers. Also, Alzahra in the interview said that she uses tests to follow-up the progress of her learners in using the new vocabulary they study in the unit.

#### 4.6.3 Challenges influencing teachers' CA practices

In the questionnaire teachers were also asked to provide up to five challenges that influence their implementation of CA. Out of the 237 teachers who contributed to the questionnaire, 164 answered this question. The challenges reported by the teachers are listed in Table 24 in descending order according to how frequently they were mentioned by the teachers. Of the 16 categories of challenges, lack of time, work overload of CA procedures, lack of understanding of the required CA procedures and large class size were mostly reported by the teachers. It does seem that the 'time', 'workload' and 'understanding of CA' factors pose as major challenges to implementing CA. Generally speaking, as shown in Table 24, the factors mentioned by the teachers are mainly related to many problems encountered relating to the challenges faced by teachers in implementing new procedures in their classroom. The degree to which the English teachers implement CA seems to be influenced by a variety of contextual factors related to the nature of CA reform introduced to teachers, school context and to the classroom environment. However, other contextual factors such as interference from school principals and subjectivity of the moderation committee were the least mentioned ones.

**Table 24: Challenges influencing implementation of CA**

Challenges influencing implementation of CA	frequency*
Lack of time to do CA	123
Overload of CA procedures (e.g. designing CA tasks, planning for CA, remedial activities, marking, giving feedback, tracking	



learners' work)	71
Lack of understanding of the required CA procedures	35
Large class sizes	33
Large number of slow learners in classrooms	21
Overload of teaching	20
Lack of cooperation from parents	12
Lack of clear understanding of CA	8
Overload of extra school activities	8
Inadequate facilities and materials	6
Lack of integrity of CA	7
Unreliability of CA	6
Emphasis on final exams	4
Learners' lack of awareness of CA criteria.	4
Subjectivity of school authority	4
Subjectivity of the moderation committee	2

\* The frequencies of these practices were first calculated using the "find" function in word processor together with manual highlighting and calculation. A further level of analysis was then applied to categorize these further.

Teachers in the interviews were asked follow-up questions in order to clarify about some particular challenges they mentioned. For example, Fuhri mentioned two main challenges for his use of CA: lack of cooperation from parents and slow learners in the classroom.

O. In the questionnaire you put this statement as one of the challenges you face when implementing continuous assessment: 'most of parents don't care about the results of assessment'.

F. yes.

O. Also you mentioned slow learners as another challenge for you to implement CA, how is this a challenge for you?

F. It takes from your time which you can use effectively in your normal good students. With good students you can achieve many things but you find yourself work slowly and do slowly in order not to ignore slow learners. If you don't have slow learners, you will be happy and your performance will be great with your students.

(F2, 19:15)

For Fuhri, dealing with slow learners in his class is time consuming. As a part of CA teachers are required to assess individual learners and according to the CA results they

should put remedial plan in place to deal with those learners (see 1.4). Perhaps, then, Fukhri's concern was due to the burden of CA with slow learners. As Table 24 shows, these particular problems of lack of time, overload of CA activities and slow learners were frequent factors.

Hussam was asked to explain why shortage of time was a challenge for his use of CA:

O. In the questionnaire, you talked about shortage of time when using CA, why is that a challenge for you? You talked about shortage of time, you didn't have time for CA techniques?

H. In English for me we have about 60 lessons in the whole. At least Grade 8 and 9 we have 60 lessons and if you make some assessment tasks you will be late in the course. For example, in semester two this year, we have 57 learning days, so this is a short period of time because we cannot finish the course if we focus on assessment only. This is a problem for us, the headmaster, and all the teachers focus on finishing the course. I don't think it is important to finish English for me, but they (students) need to get the main idea and focus on grammar and vocabulary but they (headmaster and supervisors) ask us to move on the course, this can make us under pressure.

O. Do you have any other problems with CA implementation? When you use CA, do you face any other challenges? Other than timing, of course, you talked about shortage of time. Do you have other problems?

H. yes, I rely, for example, on tasks. I do some tasks, I give students sometimes some tasks in the classroom, and some of these tasks students have to take them to home and do them at home. When students go home, they make their brothers or sisters do the tasks for them. So, this is a big problem, I can identify that this student hasn't done his task by himself. Too many students are doing so and I told them during the semester not to take anything at home, we will do all the tasks inside the classroom. This is a challenge, yes. I told them (students): you have to depend on yourself, trust your abilities, I can help you, and marks are not important more than your progress. If you make your brothers solve the task then you have learned nothing and there is no benefit of that task. This is for you, but not for your brothers or sisters. (H1, 19:49)

The above quote suggests that lack of time, overload of teaching and doing the CA tasks were influencing factors on Hussam's CA practices. Those factors thus cause delay in completing the course book which then put the teacher 'under pressure' of negative repercussions from the head teacher and supervisors. Also, the teacher mentioned another challenge for his CA practice which is related to a serious lack of integrity – or validity – at the heart of the CA system as it tends to favour learners whose parents/siblings can help. This in turn resulted in the teacher having to assess his learners in the class under his invigilation. He described this issue as 'a big problem'. However, as shown in Table

24, this particular factor of learners' carelessness was only mentioned seven times by the participants of the questionnaire.

#### **4.6.4 Training for the purpose of CA**

With regard to the question of whether the teachers attended training about CA, Table 25 shows that a high percentage of teachers (62.4) said that they did not receive any training about CA. However, as we have seen in the previous sub-section, the teachers did not consider the lack of training about CA as a challenge in their implementation of CA. It seems that formal CA training opportunities were available but they might not be enough or as frequent as teachers would wish to have. This may partially explain the low percentage of teachers who attended formal training.

**Table 25: Training for the purpose of CA**

Responses	Frequency	Percent
YES	66	27.8
NO	148	62.4
Total	214	90.3

Teachers who reported that they attended training sessions/courses about CA were asked to write about them. Out of the 66 teachers who said they attended the CA training, 47 teachers provided some information about it. Three categories emerged from the first analysis of teachers' responses: nature of the training, content, and teachers' attitudes towards it. All teachers' responses from the first analysis were further analysed and then grouped under these three categories (see Table 26).

The majority of the teachers reported that the training they received about CA was a part of the Cycle 2 course or Cycle 1 course. These two courses were mentioned 16 times by the teachers. The rest of the responses varied between short sessions, cascaded training by Senior Teachers, and pre-service training. This suggests that the training for CA was not an independent training but it was included in the annual methodology courses such as Cycle 2 course. These methodology courses usually involve a small number of participants every year (see 1.4.2). Also, as explained in the context chapter (see 1.4.2), the training for the purpose of CA is conducted occasionally based on any updates regarding CA. In such training supervisors and teacher trainers first receive central training and then cascade it to senior teachers, who in their turn cascade it to teachers in their schools (see more details in 1.4.2). This explains the low percentage of the teachers attended training on CA as shown in Table 25.

Regarding the content of the CA training, the responses in Table 26 show the basic and probably general content of the CA training which includes helping teachers to understand CA, improving their CA practices, and introducing new changes in the assessment. As Table 26 shows, the focus of the training was more on enhancing the procedures of implementing CA which correlates with the concern of the training planners of the practical part of CA.

With regard to teachers' attitudes towards the CA training, although teachers were not asked specifically to report their attitude in the question, five teachers from the 66 participants reported positive attitude towards CA, while six of them thought that CA training was not sufficient. For example, one teacher said that the “The training was useless. I felt that the teacher (provider of training) himself didn't understand the new mark guide” (code 151). This quote shows that the teacher did not value the content of the training and considered it unsupportive. Another teacher said: “There wasn't anything new in the workshop. It only emphasised on the importance of using CA” (code 159). Even though only a few teachers reported these views, they can be of significant value as they were expressed naturally without teachers being asked specifically about them. In this case, the training does not seem to meet the teachers' expectation of providing them with the necessary information and sufficient training that satisfy their assessment needs.

**Table 26: Training for the purpose of CA**

Nature of CA sessions /courses	- Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 courses (16) *
	- Cascaded training by senior teachers (5)
	- Short sessions (5)
	- Pre-service training (3)
Content of CA training	- CA procedures (16)
	- Support teachers' understanding of CA (9)
	- Introduce new changes in the assessment (6)
	- Highlight the importance of CA (3)
Teachers' attitudes towards CA training	- Insufficient training (6)
	- Positive comments (e.g. very useful) (5)

\*The frequencies were calculated out of the 47 teachers who provided information about training

In the interviews, teachers were asked to justify their responses in the questionnaire about the CA training. For example, Fukhri was asked whether the CA training was useful for him:

O. Ok, some few questions about training, actually you said (in the questionnaire) you attended some training about using CA; did that training help you in implementing CA with your students?

F. yes, very much, I attended cycle one training and cycle two training for basic education. There were very fruitful and beneficial.

O. Do you still use some of the techniques and procedures suggested by that training?

F. yeah, it was very useful for me to attend that training?

(F2, 17:52)

The quote above confirms the finding in Table 26 in that CA training was run as sessions within the methodology courses (Cycle 1 and Cycle 2 courses). It also adds another positive view about it to the ones reported in questionnaire (see Table 26), though Fukhri avoided here to respond to my question about whether he still uses the procedures and techniques he gained from that training.

The quote below by Alwaleed also supports the finding regarding the inclusion of CA training in Cycle 2 training which again explains the reason why only a small number of teachers said they attended CA training (see Table 25). However, as the quote suggests, Alwaleed here did not seem satisfied with the amount of training provided and did not feel it met his expectations.

O. You mentioned in the questionnaire that you attended training about using different ways and methods in CA?

A. Yes, I think it was in cycle two training.

O. Yeah, in cycle two, what do you think about that training? Did you get something that you can take it and use it with your students?

A. Well that course lasted for one semester and most of work was about evaluating some tasks from Grade 7; so the tutor brought us photocopied materials from Grade 7, I think most of the time from Grade 7, Grade 5, and Grade 4. We spent time analysing these activities and talking about them, so I don't think it was sufficient. It was four years ago, so I think it wasn't at the level which I were looking for, but they didn't give us any summary of that course.....I think we need to have more training about assessment.

(Aw2, 13:60)

## **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I presented an analysis of teachers' beliefs and their CA practices reported in the questionnaire. The quantitative data analysis was supported with quotes from teachers own comments on their responses in the questionnaire.

The majority of the English teachers who answered the questionnaire reported strong positive attitudes towards CA. Generally speaking, they agreed strongly with statements in the questionnaire referring to CA-type practices more than the statements about the traditional assessment practices. The six teachers in the follow-up interview confirmed this strong preference for CA and explained this with reference to the following benefits: regularity of CA through the academic year; immediacy of the information received through CA; ability of CA to motivate learners to work hard; and ability of CA to maintain strong link with the learning process and to provide opportunities for learners to compensate for earlier weaknesses. CA was seen by those teachers as more effective than the assessment at the end of the learning process. They felt that CA provides more involvement of learners in the process of assessment.

Regarding teachers' practices of CA, the analysis showed a wide reported use of CA by the teachers of English. Assessing by short tests and class-based assessment were reported as predominant CA practices, while the formative techniques such as keeping regular records of learners' CA and giving regular feedback to them were among the least reported practices. The teachers in the follow-up interview admitted their lack of keeping written CA records and confirmed their use of short tests.

With regard to challenges that influence teachers' implementation of CA, lack of time, work overload and lack of understanding of CA were reported as factors posing major challenges to implementing CA. These factors were also confirmed by the teachers in the follow-up interview.

Regarding the training about CA, the analysis showed that a large number of teachers did not receive any training about CA. The analysis revealed that the formal CA training was available but was not as frequent as to cover the majority of English teachers. The focus of the training was more on practical use of CA rather than on the rationale behind it.

These results will be discussed further in Chapter 9, along with the possible implications that could be drawn for the Omani context and for research in general. The next chapter

presents the analysis of the qualitative data related to teachers' actual CA practices and their rationale behind them.

## **CHAPTER 5: CASE 1 MUHANAD**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the case study of Muhanad. At the time of the study, Muhanad had been teaching English for seven years. He was one of six English teachers working in a Cycle 2 school for boys located about 70 km from the city centre of Ibri. Muhanad was teaching one level which consisted of three classes of Grade 10. The learners were aged between 14 and 15 years and had already finished nine years of studying English: four years of studying English as one of their school subjects at the Cycle 1 Level and five years at the Cycle 2 stage. I observed Muhanad three times in Grade 10/1 in which the number of learners ranged from 24 to 28 and were sitting in separate rows next to each other facing the board.

The following sections first present Muhanad's practices from the lessons I observed with him and from his own comments on his work in the interviews. I then proceed to comment on the extent to which Muhanad's practices reflect his beliefs about CA and the practices recommended in the guidelines of CA. For the purpose of relating Muhanad's beliefs to his practices, I will first provide a brief summary of his beliefs about CA from the previous Chapter.

### **5.2 Summary of Muhanad's beliefs about CA**

The previous chapter presented Muhanad's beliefs, together with those of the other participants of the qualitative stage of the study about using CA. I summarise below Muhanad's main beliefs derived from his strong responses to the questionnaire statements and from his own comments on these statements in the follow-up interviews. Muhanad scored the highest among the first group of participants who had strong positive views of CA: he scored 5.0 out of 5 for CA beliefs and 2.6 out of 5 for traditional assessment beliefs (see code 101 in Table 9). The analysis revealed that Muhanad valued CA because of its ongoing nature, as it provides opportunities for learners to compensate for earlier weaknesses during the assessment process. He believed that teaching and assessment should work together in order for the teacher to see, and at the same time assess, the outcomes of learning. The teacher considered assessing learners' progress



through continuous observation valuable: it provides immediate information about individual learners' general performance, and shows teachers the specific skills a learner may be having problems in. In this way, the teacher can thus put plans in place to remedy these problems. Muhanad thought that CA provides a means of self-evaluation in which learners can obtain accurate information about their learning. Muhanad seemed more in favour of CA than of final exams, as he opposed the use of final exams as the only form of assessment. However, he felt that he still has to emphasize that test-taking strategies in the classroom can prepare learners for the final exam. In addition, Muhanad agreed strongly with the statement that following learners' progress should be done through cooperation between the teacher and parents.

Having shed light on the main beliefs that Muhanad expressed about CA, as reported in the questionnaire and in the follow-up interviews, the following sections present Muhanad's practices and relate them to these beliefs and the other beliefs emerging from his comments made in interview on his practices.

### **5.3 General understanding of CA implementation**

Muhanad expressed a feeling that some teachers (maybe his peer teachers) did not seem to have clear understanding of CA. I asked him about his own understanding of CA:

Once the teacher understands the assessment rules and why do we need the assessment and he understands this is the learner-centred and the need of assessment to be within the teaching and to involve students and families (in CA). If all these things come together in developing students' ability it will be very useful and the teacher will use it (CA) in a very positive way. But, on the other hand, if the teacher understands it (CA) as it is only papers and you have to provide evidence, it will be a problem because we are cheating ourselves first, and we are also cheating the students. (M2 4:17)

Muhanad appeared to have two general views about CA implementation. The first was an ideal practice: he thought that CA could be implemented positively by teachers and would be a very useful assessment approach if teachers have a clear understanding of its rules and purposes and if they also understand that teaching is a learner-centred practice and thus CA needs to be integrated into teaching where both learners and parents are also involved in the assessment process. However, the second was a concern of inappropriate practice: if teachers only understand CA as a way of recording and providing evidence to the stakeholders, it would impair the reliability of this assessment: "it will be a problem because we are cheating ourselves first, and we are also cheating the students."

Muhanad's CA training might have influenced the development of this understanding of CA (see Table 16). He had a positive attitude about that training: "they gave us a clear idea about using it" (Code 101). Also, his long experience of dealing with CA might have helped him develop such understanding of it (see Table 16).

The concern that Muhanad expressed above on what he thought an inappropriate understanding of CA may be attributed to his negative attitude towards the formal visits to teachers made by assessment committees including supervisors, as discussed in 1.4.3, to check on their assessment records and to evaluate their use of CA. From my own experience as a former supervisor who participated in the work of such committees, this pressure exerted by these committees impacts upon teachers' practices, and sometimes make teachers emphasize the act of providing evidence of their CA on papers more than the purposeful use of it. Thus, Muhanad's negative feeling about his peer teachers' understanding of CA might be a result of his feeling that their CA practices (e.g. emphasizing the act of providing evidence) contradicted his own ideals for CA, as revealed in the quote above.

#### **5.4 Planning for CA**

As illustrated earlier in 1.4, a recommended CA practice for teachers (in SAH) is to set some specific assessment aims to be achieved in every lesson they teach based on the learning outcomes which learners are expected to achieve. Also, the teacher is required to consider in his planning for CA the information they gathered from the previous lessons. This includes noting down some specific learners to be observed and assessed during the lesson and taking notes about them (record keeping).

In the assessment section of his lesson plans (LP) Muhanad put the following notes: 'Observe individual students during group work' (LP1, Code 101), 'Assessing specific individual students' (LP2, Code 101), 'Assessment of individual students' (LP3, Code 101). I asked him whether he usually puts such CA objectives down in his lesson plan and considers them while teaching. He responded in this way:

M. Yeah, like observing actually if the students are learning or not? Are they stopping in one point or moving, progressing. This is the idea, just stopping in one point so there is no benefit of using the same criteria or the same technique, I have to change them.

O. Do you mean changing the criteria according to their assessment needs?

S. Assessment needs and also according to the learning outcomes.

O. OK, do you normally make links between CA and the lesson objectives? Of course in every lesson you teach, I think, you set some objectives to be achieved; so do you make some links between those objectives of the lesson and CA?

M. Maybe it's the same question here, yeah, because actually the continuous assessment and the teaching you are doing, let's say, they are making the same thing because you want from students to produce some kind of skills, so you teach them things and you are waiting how they are going to grasp the information, are they with you or not. This is the idea; the same thing they have to be linked together the assessment and... (learning). It's not only about giving marks, no, assessment is about aims you are putting in your mind and you want the students to get them from you.

O. OK, Ok. (M1, 26:32)

Although I asked Muhanad here specific questions about his planning for CA of his learners, he did not indicate in his reply how he plans for CA and how he makes links between teaching and CA. Muhanad seemed to be talking here about ideal practices of integrating teaching and assessment without referring to how he applies this in actual practice. Although he showed evidence of written notes of the assessment objectives (see LP1-3 above), they might not necessary reflect his intended plans of assessing some specific learners in the class as we will see later in this analysis.

## **5.5 Assessment practices during teaching**

During the observations, I noticed that Muhanad did the following:

### **5.5.1 Observation and gathering of information**

As noted earlier in 1.4, teachers are expected to gather information through CA techniques during their normal teaching to be used formatively to improve learning and summatively to award marks. During the process of gathering information they are asked to use their informal records to keep track of how learners' marks develop during the semester and also to notice any areas where help is needed.

During the three lessons I observed with Muhanad, I saw him going around the class while the learners were doing the tasks, observing and looking at their work. However, I did not notice that Muhanad made notes in his assessment register that was on his table. Also, he did not have any other records for making notes. I asked him about the purpose of observing his learners and he replied:

It's like the teacher role to give the instructions and then once they said they are ready to answer, I have to monitor them and go through the students and see: are they doing it in the right way or not; one of them is engaged or not; maybe one of them not with you, so you have to explain to them individually. Some of students are shy; they cannot speak in public and say I don't understand, so I go through them and ask them what you are doing. (M1, 19:41)

Muhanad's comments here indicate that the purpose of observing his learners was checking their understanding of what has been taught without any indication that he also was observing for the purpose of CA of his learners.

When going around the class, Muhanad stopped and talked to individual learners in the class. I asked whether he was doing so for the purpose of assessing individual learners:

Actually when they produce an answer, I try to see: do they give that answer only by coincidence or they understand it? So, if he understands, he will say yes, he will insist on his answer but if he sees me that I am a little bit between both, maybe he will change his answer. So, I want to see if they understand it and they are focusing or not. If they said yes, that's mean they are on the right path they are good students, but if they change their answers, that mean they are just picking one or two. So, this is the idea actually I use; maybe he will say or change his mind, so I ask another student to help him to see or to compare between the two answers. (M1, 11:30)

Once again, Muhanad's explanation of his practice here indicates that he talks to individuals in the class for the purpose of checking their understanding of what has been taught; however, there is no indication in his comments that he does that for the purpose of CA. There is little evidence in his comments above that he was intentionally trying to gather information for the purpose of CA. This emerges clearly in the next extract, where he stated that he selected one specific learner to check his reading ability even though he did not plan for it in his CA records:

O. Did you have any assessment purpose for choosing that particular student?

M. Firstly, I wanted to know if he is following us or not and if he can read well or not. This was the idea.

O. For that particular student, the one you chose deliberately, did you have in your CA register that you need to know more information about that student?

S. No, actually. (M2, 10:44)

Following the official procedure of using the informal CA records to keep track of the learners' progress probably was not a priority in Muhanad's work; yet, his comments in the quote above still seem to suggest he was checking the learner's understanding of what has been taught and at the same time assessing his reading ability ("if he can read well"). The possible motive behind the selection of that learner was then an assessment need he noticed naturally during the lesson rather than an intended plan for CA. His behaviour of not keeping records of assessment during teaching may be linked to the negative attitude he had towards emphasizing the act of providing evidence of CA on papers as discussed in 5.3.

Another interesting point which emerges clearly from his comments in all quotes above that Muhanad seemed to be avoiding in his responses to my questions to refer directly to CA or to reveal his position of not using CA as suggested by the official guidelines. His answers seem to be a way to avoid losing face probably due to my presence and also due to his position as a senior teacher.

Although Muhanad reported strong positive beliefs about using observation for the purpose of CA (see 5.2), it seems that his actual behaviour of using observation in the classroom does not match his stated beliefs. Muhanad hinted in his comments above that he observes for the purpose of finding immediate information about individual learners but there was no evidence in his comments and from the observation data that the observation was for the purpose of CA.

### **5.5.2 Keeping informal records**

As I illustrated in 1.4, SAH requires teachers to keep informal records of the information they gather about their learners for purposes such as planning for CA, tracking learners' performances, providing regular feedback to learners and making decisions on awarding marks of CA (see details in 1.4).

As we saw earlier, during the three lessons I observed with Muhanad I did not see him making notes about learners' assessment or using any assessment registers. After every observation with Muhanad I asked him to show me his informal records or any notes that he used to gather information for CA purposes. However, he was not able to provide me with evidence of such records. He only showed me his final CA summary sheet of semester one (see appendix 11) (I observed him at the beginning of the second semester).

The CA summary sheet is a summary representing each learner's overall achievement completed at the end of each semester, in which the various informal notes written, marks and information gathered by the teacher through CA are added together to produce a total mark out of 40.

The absence of the CA records of assessment indicates that Muhanad probably did not arrive at his learners overall achievement through ongoing systematic gathering of information. Relying on his memory seems to be the most probable source for filling in the CA summary sheet at the end of the semester.

As Muhanad did not show evidence of CA records during the lessons I observed with him, in the interview I asked him the following question:

O. Regarding CA records, the informal ones, do you think they are necessary for following-up the process of assessing students? Do you think it is necessary to be with you in the class and to use them during the lesson?

M. Do you mean the formal one, the records with marks?

O. No, I mean the informal ones, the ones that can be used to make some comments about your students' progress during the lesson.

M. Yes, I think they are very important, you know sometimes you can find what kind of interest the students have, and also you might find problems with students as individual, so if you collect information about one individual student in the class, for example, he is good in speaking, you can use this student as a model when you have a lesson about speaking or in presentations, so you can ask him or you can ask him to take the role of the teacher. You can make good use of such students. Such information you collect about students gives you an overall idea about students' progress, what kind of improvement they are having, and then you can help them according to their strengths or weaknesses

O. so you can diagnose, for example, their weaknesses and their strengths and the use of these records helps you having clear idea about each student in the class?

M. yeah, it helps you, it's like a CV about the students, when you have an overall idea about the student, you understand him, even the question you ask him will be different, so you will be able to provide feedback to him according to his actual level. This is the idea, because we have individuals, and therefore we need to identify different points (levels) in their weaknesses. (M2, 18:54)

Although, as I illustrated above according to the observation data, there was no evidence of the informal CA records in Muhanad's work, he tried here to show an awareness of those informal records during the interviews. His immediate clarification of my first

question probably indicates his reaction towards asking him about something that he does not normally use for gathering information about his learners. Thus, he seemed to be making real-time explanations in response to my question. One possible factor that probably led him not to consider using informal records for information gathering on individual learners' progress is his large class size of 28 learners (see Table 16).

Muhanad's comments above (M2, 18:54) indicate his awareness of the process of gathering information for identifying learners' overall progress and then for informing decisions on supporting strengths or remedying weaknesses. This awareness seemed to be aligned with his views on CA reported in the questionnaire (see 5.2). However, the absence of the ongoing record keeping in Muhanad's work reflects a mismatch between his stated beliefs and his actual practices, as it was also revealed in the earlier sections.

### **5.5.3 Other types of assessment methods**

As suggested by SAH, teachers are advised to use CA to gather information from other different sources. I asked him about those sources:

O. As you know there are different types of assessment techniques, what type of assessment techniques do you prefer to use for the purpose of assessing your students? You talked about observations and self-assessment, what else do you use to assess your students?

M. even the self-assessment by the students themselves sometimes they will say it's good, even though, for example, in the speaking, sometimes I ask them, how was the presentation? Do you understand it? What kind of information did you learn from it? It is like a self-evaluation, you ask the student himself, how do you find your presentation? Was it good? Did you prepare well for it? Do you think you can do it in a better way? It's about self-evaluation and sometimes peer evaluation, sometimes I ask students to evaluate each other. (M2, 16:04)

Although I asked Muhanad about other assessment techniques he prefers to use as a part of CA, he picked up self-assessment (perhaps from my question) as he probably felt more confident to talk about it. Also, he perhaps meant to deviate from the topic in order to avoid answering my question about the other CA techniques. Muhanad was a senior teacher in his school and thus his comments about self-assessment, perhaps, was an attempt to show his status as a senior person and his awareness of the CA tools during the interview, as we have seen this also in his comments about record keeping (see M2, 18:54).

Regarding Muhanad's comments above about asking learners how they felt their presentation went, they do not clearly indicate that he actually uses this technique as a part of CA. Using self-assessment as a component of CA was not evident in Muhanad's actual practices of assessment as he was not able to provide evidence of self-assessment instruments completed by the learners such as questionnaires or learning journals, though they are both available in the course book. Therefore, it was unlikely that Muhanad uses his learners' self-assessment for remedial purposes as recommended by the official guidelines (see 1.4). Probably reading each individual learner's self-assessment instrument or notes and keeping records of them were time consuming and complicated practices for Muhanad as he had a class of 28 learners. These two factors were the most dominant challenges for using CA as reported in the quantitative part of the study (see Table 24).

Another CA form suggested in SAH is assessing by presentations. As suggested in SAH, learners should be given regular opportunities during the semester to practice speaking in front of an audience, starting with mini-presentations on easy topics, and gradually increasing the length and complexity of the task. Teachers are expected to use checklists or make notes to assess learners. As we saw earlier (M2, 16:04) Muhanad said that he uses presentation to assess his learners' speaking skills. Muhanad also showed me evidence of the notes he made about presentations (see appendix 12) and the checklists he used for awarding marks (see appendix 13). These documents suggest that Muhanad was aware of the official practice of assessing learners' speaking by presentations; yet, he did not seem to assess presentations on a regular basis as he used only one checklist for each learner during the whole of semester one.

In the quote below, Muhanad felt that assessing by presentation was a challenge for him. He stated that he faced difficulties in convincing his learners to do presentations in front of the class. The learners were reluctant because they were unfamiliar with this type of assessment:

So, I explained this many times to the students and they were reluctant in choosing the topic until I forced them and I gave them a deadline whether to give, provide me with the topic or they will get zero in the mark. So, once they chose the topics I put them with dates and they started doing. Sometimes I repeated the presentation for them because they only read from a paper. It's not about reading because reading actually is not a presentation. (M1, 3:22)



We saw above, according to the observation data, Muhanad used presentations to assess each of his learners only once during the whole of semester one. His comments above about his learners' reluctance to do presentations perhaps explain the reason why he was unable to assess by presentations as suggested by the CA guidelines.

In addition, his words 'I forced them', his warning to learners and providing them with a deadline indicate that there was a pressure on him to assess by presentations. The pressure exerted by the Moderation Committees to check teachers' use of CA, as we also saw in 5.3, could have an influence on Muhanad's large emphasis on presentations. This could be due to his need to have something in hand to show to the Moderation Committee that he was assessing presentations. This suggests that Muhanad adopts some of the CA procedures suggested by the guidelines because they will be checked by the officials. In this case, some procedures of CA may be used by the teacher, not in relation to the needs of assessing learners and without understanding the beliefs underlying them, but for the demands of using these procedures due to the external force.

Beside presentations, teachers are also required to assess the learners' interaction during the semester in a variety of contexts in the classroom. This assessment adds up, together with the assessment of presentations, to the overall assessment of speaking skill. Muhanad showed me evidence of the assessment he made of his learners' interaction. He only used one checklist for each learner in the class as evidence of his speaking during the whole of semester one (see appendix 13), as he did in presentation. As was the case in presentations, arriving at the learners' overall assessment of speaking by one checklist during the semester does not seem to reflect the ongoing nature of CA. Thus, his practice of just using one checklist to assess his learners was probably for the purpose of following the official procedure in order to show evidence to the Moderation Committee as we saw above regarding the assessment of presentations.

His large emphasis on presentations, as we have seen above, aroused my interest to ask Muhanad about his views on the value of assessing speaking by CA:

M. It's very useful actually, but I have some comments about the marking system because for example in speaking they gave 15 marks. I think it is not ethical.

O. Not ethical or not enough?

M. Not ethical, I mean it should be less than 15 marks. To be ethical it should be less than 15 marks because teacher can give them a mark that they don't deserve and we end up by cheating the students. (M2, 5:39)

Muhanad seemed to be aware of the criteria for awarding marks for CA. However, he criticized CA for lack of reliability and its effect on ethics. He clearly felt, as his comments suggest, that the weighting mark for speaking was inappropriate and thus affects the overall reliability of the grade the learner receives. His use of phrases such as 'not ethical', 'because teacher can give them a mark that they don't deserve', and 'cheating students' (also revealed in 5.3 above) indicate his attitude towards the reliability issue of CA. The quote below illustrates this more:

O. so you think this ethical thing is related to teachers themselves.

M. yes, to teachers because they are given the chance because they are given 15 marks, so if you give us 15 marks and we know it is Grade 10, students need even 1 mark, it is useful for them. So it should be less and we can divide the other marks into other skills or we can add other things to be assessed. (M2 4:54)

In saying that the ethical issue was related "to teachers because they are given the chance", then, Muhanad was implying a criticism of CA for the lack of reliability. This concern was also highlighted at the start of this chapter in 5.3 (and I discuss it here below in M2, 26:04) in which Muhanad felt that CA can be unreliable if teachers only understand it as a way of recording and providing evidence on papers.

As a response to my enquiry about the techniques that he uses to assess other language skills, Muhanad stated that he assesses writing by reading several drafts of his learners' writing during the semester and providing feedback according to the types of mistakes they make. He showed me samples of some learners writing (see appendices 12 & 13). However, he expressed concerns about the tendency of some learners to copy or ask someone else to do their written work as follows:

O. Regarding this aspect you have just mentioned, do you mean that students do not submit their actual work, does that mean they tend to copy or ask someone else to do their writing and when they do so you will not be able to identify their actual progress?

M. Let's be frank, some teachers will give them the mark but I do not do that, I have to read all the paragraphs of the writing, every individual word, sometimes I mark these words as spelling mistakes, sometimes grammatical or syntax or something that needs to be done again. From doing so, I notice whether the work is written by the student or not. So, actually I need the actual work which is done by the student even if it is not that much good, what I need to see that his efforts is translated into

work. But, unfortunately, some teachers gave the students the mark (though they knew the written work was not done by students). Students thought that I will be doing the same, for that reason I wanted them to know my way of assessing their written work and of course to make it clear to them that I don't want perfect work but I want to see that their efforts are translated into work. So, sometimes, I ask them repeat the work. (M2, 26:04)

In SAH, teachers are advised to gather information by looking closely at learners' written work, whether this work has been done in class, as homework or as part of a project. This shows learners' progress over time in which teachers can monitor, provide feedback, and at the same time assess. Muhanad's rationale here of assessing writing appears to be in line with the suggested procedure. However, when looking at the learners' written work (see appendices 12 & 13), there was not much feedback given by Muhanad: short comments (e.g. excellent), ticks, and lines under grammatical and spelling mistakes. Also, Muhanad showed me two pieces of written work for each learner in his class from semester one: interactive writing (see appendix 14) and informative writing (see appendix 15). He also showed me the CA summary sheet (see appendix 9) which he used for cumulative awarding of the marks collected on the basis of CA. There are icons in this CA summary sheet for each of those two types of writing. However, when comparing the marks given to those pieces of writing with the marks filled in the summary sheet, I found that Muhanad only relied on those two pieces of work for filling in the icons in the CA summary sheet. This suggests that Muhanad based his judgment of his learners' writing skill on two pieces of writing only, rather than on CA of their writing over the semester.

One possible factor that probably led him to adopt the above behaviour was his concern, as expressed in the above quote, that the teachers (in his school) award the marks without doing CA of writing: 'Let's be frank, some teachers will give them the mark, but I do not do that', 'But, unfortunately some teachers gave the students the mark', 'Students thought that I will be doing the same' (M2, 26:04). His comments in the quote imply two things: first, once again, his criticism of the CA system for the lack of reliability as there is chance for inaccurate judgment of the learner's actual performance by other teachers; second, a conflict between his ideal practices and contextual factors, between what he wanted his learners to do and what his learners expected him to do as a result of other teachers' behaviour.

Moreover, Muhanad's concern about the above issue made him adopt some other assessment procedures not related to CA:

So, sometimes, I ask them repeat the work. Sometimes I unexpectedly ask them to do it in the class. This will give me chance to see their actual performance and to let them practice in an environment which is similar to the final exam. (M2, 26:04)

Muhanad comments here about asking the learners to do their writing in the class under his invigilation and without giving them any notice. This seems to be evidence of a desire to prioritize making his learners produce their own writing and thus to be able to do this writing in the final exam. It seems here that he was not following the official procedure of getting the learners to do the writing at home as there was a risk of some learners either copying or asking someone else to do the writing for them. Also, following the official procedure does not seem to serve Muhanad's desire of preparing his learners for the final exam.

I asked Muhanad about other CA techniques he uses to assess his learners:

M. Yes, sometimes we have peer visits from other teachers and they tell us some kind of students' weaknesses, also, the head teacher and his deputy they sometimes come and see something that you don't normally see about the students, maybe the students are not focusing or still they have some kind of problems, they usually tell us about such problems and we usually think about them and we write them down and we try to solve them.

O. Do you mean you ask for other opinions or for second opinions from other teachers?

M. yeah, yeah

O. Do you discuss this with that teacher?

M. Yeah, because actually sometimes when I ask my colleagues to visit me in my lesson, I tell them not to come for general visit, for example, I ask them to focus on problems such as class management, timing or in something. Sometimes I ask them to focus on students, what can you see, what can you notice, so it will be a direct visit, sometimes general and sometimes a direct visit. (M2, 14:14)

Although my question was about the CA techniques, Muhanad's rationale above about using peer visits provides no evidence of how the information gathered through those visits contributes to CA of the learners. Peer visits may provide information about learning but they are not a suggested procedure for CA of learners. Thus, once again as in

5.5.2, his rationale here seemed to be based on real time reflection during the interview about using CA.

#### **5.5.4 Using assessment to remedy learners' weakness**

It is strongly recommended in the guidelines of CA that teachers use the information gathered through CA for formative purposes to identify the weakness of slow learners and to build on the success of outstanding learners. Teachers are expected to make written plans for both weak and outstanding learners. Those plans are a mandatory, official requirement for which officials from the Assessment Department and also supervisors often visit teachers to check them (see 1.4).

As summarized in 5.2 Muhanad had reported strong positive views specifically about using CA results to remedy learners' weakness. I asked him whether he uses CA assessment results for any diagnostic purposes. He stated:

M. We have two plans for those students and we follow them: for slow learners, we give them remedial plans and for the outstanding students we have special activities for them. For the outstanding students we have a list of them and we make them the leaders of groups during the group work to provide help to other students. We also ask them to prepare for the English programmes. We also take those students who have problems in reading, speaking and engage them in these English programmes to read simple things like wisdoms, sentences and something like this.

O. So according to the diagnostic assessment results you set those programmes in the school to involve both weak and outstanding students?

M. Yes, yes, we do these programmes for both weak and outstanding students, yeah. (M2, 9:07)

As we have seen from the analysis in this account, there is no evidence that Muhanad was carrying out CA of his learners and keeping ongoing records of their performance. Therefore, the selection of learners for those plans was not likely done according to a systematic approach of assessment. In this case, he might have considered putting those plans into place due to their official importance as explained above and thus his implementation of them was only superficial.

#### **5.5.5 Using assessment results to improve teaching**

As noted earlier in 5.5.1, teachers are advised to use the assessment information which has been gathered through CA formatively to improve students' learning. This involves

adapting lessons. I asked Muhanad about the lesson adaptation he did for the previous lesson I observed with him:

O. You told me on Sunday about lesson adaptation, do you do this lesson adaptation according to the assessment information you collect about your students' learning in the classroom?

M. Firstly, it's a change for routine. Secondly, you need students to focus more; sometimes the course book contains lots of things that are recycled and not important so you have to adapt the lesson or the task into a way that direct the students into something that you want them to do.

O. But from where do you get these pieces of information?

M. Through my teaching, after noticing the kind of teaching that I do during the day, I found that I need to do kind of adaptation for the lesson to the tasks.

O. Ok, you change your way of teaching for example?

M. Sometime I decide to teach them in the Learning Recourses Centre and sometimes we take them to the Active Class where we use the active board.

O. So you set up some programmes or some techniques according to the needs of the students?

M. Yeah, yeah,

O. and according to the CA information you collect from the class?

M. Yeah, yeah, we sometimes give them videos; sometimes we have real pictures that we can show in the active board. It is a kind of adaptation for the lesson rather than the book itself. Sometimes we don't take the book to the LRC (Learning Recourses Centre) and to the Active Class, I only ask them to take the exercise book.  
(M2, 7:54)

Although Muhanad believed, as summarized in 5.2, in using CA results to improve teaching, his comments above do not suggest that he adapted his teaching according to CA of learners. As his comments suggest, he seemed to be doing this according to his own reflection on his normal teaching without referring specifically to the use of CA for gathering information about learning: 'Through my teaching, after noticing the kind of teaching that I do during the day'.

Another observation from Muhanad's comments is that he tried in his rationale to avoid providing a direct answer to my question about whether the adaptation of his teaching was a result of CA. Although I repeated my question again for confirmation and I

deliberately mentioned CA, he replied with little attention to the question. There is also the possibility that Muhanad thought that talking about the various programmes and activities would impress me during the interview.

## **5.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed account of Muhanad's work during the lessons I observed with him and from his comments in the interviews on his actual assessment practices. This chapter showed that his actual practices were largely incongruent with his stated beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaire and confirmed in the follow-up interviews. Although Muhanad showed awareness of the process of gathering information through CA, following the official procedure of using CA to keep track of the learners' progress was not a priority in his work. There was evidence in the analysis that his behaviour of not using CA may be linked to factors related to his negative attitude towards CA due to the reliability issue, attitude towards his peer teachers' assessment practices, his learners' expectation and some other contextual factors such as the large number of learners in the class and the role of the Moderation Committee and MOE officials. However, Muhanad did not directly rationalize the absence of CA in his work with references to those factors. As his analysis indicates, the power of those factors influenced his behaviour and resulted in actual assessment practices incongruent with his stated beliefs about CA such as using some required procedures of CA superficially and also altering the procedures to meet the situation in his classroom. Another major issue which emerged in the analysis is that Muhanad seemed to be making real-time explanations during the interview to avoid revealing his behaviour of not using CA as suggested by the official guidelines and also to avoid losing face due to his position as a senior teacher.

## **CHAPTER 6: CASE 2 BADAR**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the case study of Badar the second teacher in the qualitative stage of my study. As it was the case with Muhanad, Badar was also chosen to participate because he had highly positive beliefs about CA and less positive beliefs about traditional assessment: he scored 4.5 out of 5 for CA beliefs and 2.8 out of 5 for traditional assessment beliefs (see Table 9 for the participant's code 82). Badar had been involved in teaching English for seven years. There were three other English teachers in his Cycle 2 School for boys located near the city centre of Ibri. He was teaching three levels which consisted of three Grades 7, 9, and 11. I observed Badar on two occasions in Grade 7 in which the learners were aged from 9 to 11 and were sitting in three groups.

### **6.2 Summary of Badar's beliefs about CA**

In the questionnaire, Badar generally expressed strong beliefs about the value of CA as an assessment approach and he showed clear understanding of its methods. For the purpose of relating Badar's beliefs to his practices, I summarise below Badar's main beliefs derived from his comments in the interview on his strong responses to the questionnaire statements presented in Chapter 4. He believed in the following:

- CA can increase learners' motivation and help in understanding learners' progress.
- The teacher can arrive at learners' final achievement through continuous follow-up of their progress which makes him able to determine their level.
- The process of CA should involve designing suitable tasks and regularly checking them as well as considering both learners' past learning and their current performances, giving credit to any progress students have made to predict learners' expected achievement.
- CA is a more effective tool in assessing learners than assessing them only at the end of the learning process because the ongoing process of CA can allow teachers to follow up learners' progress continuously.
- Self-assessment, as a part of CA, helps learners to improve the quality of their work.



- CA has the advantage of providing a clear picture about learners' progress which in turn helps teachers provide parents with sufficient information about their children.

### **6.3 Badar's assessment practices**

#### **6.3.1 Planning for CA**

Unlike Muhanad, Badar did not put any notes regarding CA in the assessment section of his lesson plans. I asked him whether he considers CA when planning for his lessons:

Mainly I don't focus on assessment; I focus on objectives for each task, so I know each task and what I want my students to learn. So I don't know if this is part of assessment; I just do it this way. I focus on objectives and I make sure that the students achieve them. (B1 38:19)

Badar did not seem to consider assessment opportunities in his planning for his teaching. His focus was on achieving the objectives of the tasks. His comments suggest lack of attention of having clear aims to identify CA opportunities during normal teaching.

I used an example to clearly identify if Badar did not have an intention to assess by CA:

O. Do these objectives have any relation with CA? For example, if one of your objectives is to make your students write a paragraph about Ibn Al Nafees, and you want to achieve it in one or two lessons, so does this objective have any links with CA? For example, assessing their writing skill or observing the process of writing itself?

B. For example, in this lesson each task is leading to other tasks and at the end the students should be able to write that short paragraph and then they will put it in their portfolio. Then, I can assess them in their writing. Sometimes, I ask them to rewrite it; if they have some spelling problems, punctuations or anything I want them to improve. Sometimes I give them, for example, marks out of five, so every time they write they know they have to get out of five; if they get 3, they rewrite it to get 4 or 5. So I think this is the kind of assessment and at the end if I want to assess writing, I use this data in their portfolio, for example, to assess writing. (B1 37:30)

Badar did not seem confident whether what he was doing was related to planning for CA. As his comments above suggest, it seems that planning for assessment was a part of his normal planning for teaching without specifically bearing in mind objectives for CA: there is no indication in his comments above or in his lesson plans of intention for exploiting opportunities in the classroom for the purpose of CA. His final comment above about assessing writing at the end using the data from the learners' portfolios

points to a belief that Badar may have had of assessing at the end by using portfolios rather than assessing continuously.

Another observation that can be extracted from his comments is that my second clarification about planning for CA perhaps aroused his attention to talk about planning for assessment, though contradicts what he said in (B1 38:19).

I will now discuss how far his planning appears to be consistent with his practice.

### **6.3.2 Exploiting opportunities during teaching for CA**

As recommended in SAH (see 1.4), one of the techniques used for investigating the learning outcomes is by exploiting the classroom interaction. It is also recommended during this process that the teacher keeps a notebook (informal record keeping) ready for brief, spontaneous notes on learner performances which occur naturally as part of the lesson. In all the lessons I observed with Badar, I noticed that oral questioning was very common: he was raising questions, and also encouraging learners to answer his questions. However, I did not notice any note taking or the use of any assessment registers during those lessons. I asked him the following questions:

O. I noticed mainly there was teacher-pupil interaction all through the lesson. Was there any intended purpose behind that?

B. Yeah, because sometimes I want to know how students respond, do they understand the task? Do they understand the instructions? So, when I ask them questions sometimes I want to understand what they are going to do, what they are expected to do from the task, are they able to complete the task. Sometimes, I ask them questions to know if they have problems in doing that task and also to check if they have achieved the goal or not. Even for that dialogue task, one of my aims is to check their ability to form questions and to give them great chance to speak. I got the students to perform it (the dialogue) as a model. Maybe later on in the next lesson, they are going to ask their own questions without reading. (B2 38:30)

Badar's rationale behind the oral questioning suggests that he was doing it for several purposes: checking learners' understanding, identifying learning problems, checking his achievement of the goal and checking the learners' abilities to form questions. Although these purposes reflect a sense of awareness by Badar of exploiting the oral questioning to gather information on some aspects of learning, his comments do not suggest that he was alert to the fact that information was being gathered regarding the purpose of CA. The absence of note taking during the lessons also supports his lack of attention towards utilizing the opportunity of oral questioning for CA of his learners. It seems that the

requirement of the CA guidelines of exploiting the classroom interaction for CA was not part of his consideration at that time.

Designing specific tasks (task-based assessment) is a suggested CA procedure. As we saw earlier in the above quote (B2 38:30), Badar aims of using "the dialogue task" was to check his learners' ability in forming questions and to provide them with opportunities to speak. I asked whether he deliberately designed that task for any assessment purposes:

O. So have you designed that task deliberately for the purpose of assessing their speaking and mainly forming questions?

B. Mainly forming questions, yeah mainly forming questions and to identify how they ask questions when someone was ill, how they ask it, and how they answer it. Also, this is going to recycle some words they already know, recycle meaning of words like headache, or some other words. (B2 36:20)

Badar reported a belief that CA can be achieved through designing suitable tasks for the purpose of identifying learners' achievement of different aspects of learning (see 6.2). Badar comments above suggest that he used the task as a technique to check the learners' ability to form questions, yet there was no indication in his comments above or in the observation data that the information gathered through that task would be used for the purpose of CA. During the observation of that task I did not notice Badar making any record of the learners' performance. Thus, there seemed no intention on his part to deliberately collect information for CA. Badar's practice above of designing that particular tasks does not appear to match his belief of exploiting the designed tasks to be used for formative and summative purposes of CA.

Badar selected two learners and he invited them to do a punctuation task on the board, I asked him about the purpose behind inviting them:

Yeah, I chose the first one because I wanted a model of all because I discovered they were very confused; they didn't understand the task; I wasn't expecting this. I thought it's going to be a very easy task but I found that they weren't really sure about what to do in that task, how to use contractions and apostrophe, so I tried to find someone who understood the task and who was able to do it as a model for others. That is why I chose those students at the beginning. (B2 32:57)

Another opportunity for CA, suggested by SAH, is to assess some specific learners while they are doing the task during the lesson. Badar's choice of those learners was to provide models for others on how to do the task. Although this could be an opportunity for CA

during the normal teaching, there is little evidence that CA was part of Badar's thinking of the selection of those learners.

I asked Badar about the purpose of another similar behaviour of observing the learners while they are doing the tasks:

O. Ok, I saw you going around and checking students work; I saw you doing this several times, did you have any aims behind that?

B. Yeah, my aim was to check their understanding of the task and to myself understand what they are doing and at the same time give them support they need. For example, if they are hesitating about something or they are not sure what they should do; sometimes I found them opening the wrong page or they are doing another thing. So, I just wanted to make sure that everyone is doing the same thing and just to give them help when they need it. Sometimes I check their writing and I find they misspell some words or do something not in a good way. (B1 23:57)

Badar's main aim behind that practice was to check the learners' understanding of the tasks for the purpose of arriving at a clearer understanding of their performance and thus provide help where it was needed. Although this practice appeared to be in line with Badar's reported beliefs about noticing learners' progress to arrive at a clear understanding of their achievement and their learning difficulties (see 6.2), noticing learners' performances without keeping record of them does not serve the purposes of CA. Again, the absence of record keeping during that observation of his class seems to indicate that CA was not part of Badar's thinking at that time.

I asked Badar a more specific question about the purpose of the practices he mentioned in his rationale in the previous quotes (B2 32:57) and (B1 23:57):

O. Do you do such things (selection of learners and observation) for the purpose of collecting information to keep a record of their progress as a part of CA and to know more about individual students?

B. I don't, I don't do it in a formal way like taking notes. They are not many so I know my students, I know if they are working; if you ask me about what happened in two lessons time, I can tell you what happened. (B1 21:49)

Badar was aware that the lack of keeping record during observation contradicts the official recommendations of the CA guidelines: 'I don't do it in a formal way like taking notes' (B1 21:49). His reason for not doing so was due to the fact that he had a small class which, according to his belief, would enable him to remember the information

gathered about the learners. A more detailed discussion of the rationale behind his behaviour of not taking notes is provided below in 6.3.5.

During my observations of Badar's classes, the learners were sitting in three groups. Assessing learners during group and pair work is a requirement of CA in which the teacher is expected to observe and make notes about their performance while they interact during the activities (see 1.4). In the following quote, Badar explained the rationale behind putting his learners into groups during the English lessons:

B. In other lessons they sit in rows but it is only in English lessons they have to sit in groups. They know before I come to the class they form those groups because, sometimes, I ask them to do peer-evaluation.

O. Peer evaluation? Tell me about this peer evaluation?

B. I do it every time for every task I do it, so if I ask them, for example, to complete that fact file, I give them like one minute to check their answers with groups. This will give them, I mean, they don't have to cheat from each other because nobody is going to look at it; I just want them to learn. At the beginning they will hide their answers from each other, so first they have to do it themselves, and then they check their answers with each other. Then, we do the whole class checking.

O. So, is this a part of CA? You don't only do it yourself, but you allow more opportunities to your students to check each other work?

B. Yeah to assess themselves, to compare their answers with their classmates. Sometimes, when they answer they try to challenge each other: my answers are right, yours are wrong and I got all the answers right. (B1 32:55)

Peer assessment was one of the aims behind Badar's decision of putting his learners into groups. His comments suggest his regular use of this practice for the purpose of providing opportunities for his learners to check their answers and then to compare them with their classmates. However, there is no evidence from his comments or from the observation data that Badar makes use of such classroom discourse for CA of his learners: Badar did not indicate here that he uses such group work for CA and I did not see him taking notes while learners were interacting with each other.

### **6.3.3 Learning journals**

A learning journal is another CA tool suggested in the curriculum in which the learners are encouraged to use for self-assessment after they finish each unit in the course book (see 1.4). Badar said he asked the learners to complete their learning journal at home and

he showed me examples of the completed journals. When I asked him about those journals he replied as follows:

B. I remind them every week to, for example, mainly on Wednesdays to go home to write something about what they have learnt during the week. I think, this is useful for them to evaluate themselves on what they learn and remind themselves about what they have learnt. I think it is a good way even for me when I see that (learning journal) I see different students, so I see different things, I know more about each student, what they are learning, sometimes you understand what they like to learn, sometimes one student write, for example, about apostrophe because he liked the lesson, so he wrote about it. Other students, for example, liked reading about animals or...

O. So, is it a way to discover their preferences?

B. Yeah, preferences.

O. So do you use that learning journal to get an idea about each student?

B. Even at the end of each unit, they have to write what they liked and what they didn't like about the unit, yeah, they evaluate themselves, but you can make use of that because you will know learning style inside the classroom. (B2 2:12)

As Badar noted in his comments above, the purpose behind the learning journals is to allow learners to assess themselves. Badar's beliefs here of using the learning journal to discover more about his learners' own learning styles, which lessons they enjoy, and what they learnt reflect the formative part of CA in which the teachers use the information from the learning journal to support learning. Also, Badar's comments above reflect his reported beliefs regarding encouraging self-assessment for the purpose of involving learners in the process of assessment (see 6.2). However, as his comments suggest, Badar was not clear how he uses these learning journals as part of CA. There is little evidence in the quote above, in the observation or in his lesson plans which suggest that he was reading them and using them regularly for CA purposes.

#### **6.3.4 Assessing by projects**

Assessing by projects is one of the CA tools suggested by SAH. SAH considers projects as a teaching strategy, but the work produced by learners through these projects provides opportunities for both summative and formative purposes of CA. In other words, projects are regarded as providing further evidence for the learner's achievement in the language learning outcomes and therefore the teacher is required to assess the language skills (outcomes) involved in carrying out the project. For formative purposes, the teacher

assesses the progress of the learner in language skills and provides feedback accordingly. For the summative purpose, the teacher uses the relevant CA rating scale(s) to assess these language skills used in the project but not the whole project (see 1.4).

Projects are one of the techniques that Badar stated that he assessed his learners' progress with and he showed me samples of his learners completed work achieved through these projects. He talked about projects as follows:

B. Projects, we have them from the curriculum itself. I think, in each unit we have one project. In those projects we work into steps: every time they do one step. For example, the last project they did was a project about interviewing an old person talking about life in Oman in the past. First, they chose the person: they chose grandmothers, grandfathers. Then they chose how to record the information using recorders and cameras. Then, there was a sheet to record their questions; they have models in their skills book for those questions: questions about different things in the past such as education and health. They are related to some of the topics we covered in the previous units. They conducted the interviews and then they organized their writing using the model: we have a form which gives them information on how to organize their writing such as starting with introduction, then more information and then conclusion. Even they have to decide which picture to include: are they going to draw them or going to collect them and from where they collect them, from the internet or from books. Then, the final thing they did was writing about an old person's life in the past using the information they collected.

O. How much time do you normally allow for such projects?

B. I sometimes take parts in each lesson. For example, today we are going to just choose the person, to think about someone, they have to decide. I give them the chance to give their opinions; I don't interfere, so if they choose their fathers, uncles, mothers. Then we decide upon a timetable: we have to finish writing on Saturday, and you have to finish the interview next Monday. At the end we decide which day they have to submit their final work. (B1 11:38)

Badar's explanation of the process of doing projects seems to reflect an understanding of its pedagogic purpose how it is meant to work. It seems that he gives his learners feedback during the process and gives the mark at the end. Also, providing opportunities for learners to do their projects in less controlled ways (e.g. "I give them the chance to give their opinions; I don't interfere.") and involving them in assessing the projects match his reported belief about self-assessment (see 6.2).

I asked Badar how he assesses the project:

B. I keep following their work to check their work. Also, they check themselves and they have checklists to check their own progress. First

of all, they have to decide, so I check that everyone has made a decision. During this I don't give marks but I follow up the whole process: I check the questions, the interviews, all the papers, even that checklists they did them, the organization of the writing and the final work. When it's become all together, then I give them a mark about it. (B1 7:37)

As it is clear from Badar's comments, he does not seem to follow the required CA procedure, as I described above, for the assessment of the specific language skills (outcomes) involved in carrying out the project but he assesses the whole process of the project. Although Badar did not explain the motive behind this behaviour in his comments, it is perhaps aroused by a belief of the suitability of this approach of following the whole process of project rather than only assessing the outcomes of the project.

### **6.3.5 Keeping informal records**

As I mentioned earlier in Case 1, keeping informal records is a recommended official practice by SAH. During the lessons I observed with Badar I did not see him taking notes of his observations or keeping any records of assessment during teaching. Badar stated earlier in 6.3.2 that he depends on his memory, as he had a small class of eleven learners, rather than taking notes while observations. His words 'I don't do it in a formal way ' (B1 21:49) also indicate his lack of preference to keeping record of CA during teaching. After my second observation with Badar I repeated the same notice:

O. Also, in this lesson I didn't notice any record keeping of students' progress...?

B. Yeah, I told you I don't keep everyday records, I don't do it unfortunately, laugh.... (B2 32:00)

O. Ok, you said you don't keep a CA record of students' progress during the lesson, what about after the lesson, do you put some notes that particular student has made his homework?

B. Sometimes I do, but not in this lesson, sometimes I just remember them. I remember yesterday two of them did their homework, so I didn't even check them, I just checked the others. (B2 30:44)

Badar's reply 'I don't do it unfortunately' and laugh seems to reflect how he felt during the interview as he perhaps thought that I was asking him about things that he should be doing. Also, his explanation of relying on his memory instead of keeping record of his learners' CA shows similar feeling, which perhaps made him justify his position of not using informal records of CA.



In the next quote, Badar provided more explanation why he did not use the procedure of taking notes: 'Even taking notes, taking everyday notes like written notes, sometimes you find it very difficult to follow' (B2 2:40). Also, in the following quote Badar provided other justifications for his behaviour of not using informal records of CA:

If we focus on one class, for example, Grade 7, I don't usually have time to finish the lesson because it is just 40 minutes or 35 minutes. It is not enough to take notes every day, if you can do it for one day or two, you can't do it every day so, that's why. Sometimes I have classes after each other, like, if you go from one class to another, you can't go back to your room and write notes about your students' progress in the classes. Sometimes, even you forget about them. (B2 4:42)

Badar's comments here regarding taking notes of his learners' CA seem to contradict his previous comments about using his memory to form judgment of the learners: "If you ask me about what happened in two lessons' time, I can tell you what happened" (see B1 21:49 above). Although he said earlier that he can recall the information gathered about the learners at any time, he stated here that it is difficult to remember the information even from the last lesson. Thus, this mismatch between the reasons he provided for the absence of note taking may indicate that these justifications were real-time rationale to defend his position. Another possible explanation for this behaviour is the teacher's tendency to do what is easy and more familiar to him rather than adopting the required CA procedures. More evidence of this behaviour will emerge during this analysis.

In his reply to my question on the value of CA as an assessment approach, taking notes was again the main concern for him and he also provided justifications for not using it:

I think it needs time because you can't do it like you start doing continuous assessment if you are not doing, and it needs like more work and more time to conduct because it is not an easy task. Every day you have to take notes about students' progress, even when you go to class you have to specify some students that you want to focus on and, for example, if we have listening you have to come to the class with some students in mind to focus on to see how they are in listening. I don't feel that all teachers are doing that because they all now rely on students' portfolios. They all, I think, even to fill in our registers and records, we just mainly try to find evidence from their (students') portfolios, but the daily one (keeping a record of students' daily progress) I belief on it, but I am not doing it maybe because it is easy for me to identify problems with my students (he has small classes). But for those who have big classes, maybe they need it more to write notes about each student, sometimes this will help you in assessing those students. But at the end, if you don't have, like, evidence for giving students a certain mark, you say how I can give five for this student without having, like, evidence for giving this kind of awards. (B2 15:46)

Once again, defending his position of not taking notes was probably one of the reasons behind Badar's explanations of the difficulties in using the CA note taking. In addition, his rationale above shows awareness on his part of the CA requirement of exploiting the opportunities during normal teaching but it also indicates his attitude towards CA. Although Badar had a class of nine learners and was teaching 15 lessons a week, he expressed here a large dissatisfaction to apply CA in practice. His repetition of the phrase 'you have' four times to describe the CA requirements perhaps reflects his negative attitude towards CA and towards implementing it in his class.

Another interesting point here is Badar's comments about only relying on portfolios to fill in the registers (CA final registers) rather than doing CA. His words "I don't feel that all teachers are doing that because they all now rely on students' portfolios" may indicate a realization by Badar that relying on portfolios is a common practice among teachers in his school or among colleagues in the region. Also, providing evidence of learners' assessment seems to be a concern for Badar and therefore he criticized the reliability of note taking to provide such evidence of awarded marks. He expressed his preference for using portfolios, instead of these informal records (taking notes), for finding evidence of learners' assessment. The reason for this criticism is more obvious below:

They (teachers) are asked by their supervisors and if you are recording some marks they (supervisors) will need evidence, you can't give them, like, I write notes about students' progress, I think they (supervisors) don't believe in notes. (B2 10:39)

Badar's concern of providing evidence to supervisors of the marks awarded thus had a powerful influence on the development of these beliefs about not keeping informal records of CA and, hence, in his practices and beliefs about the tools used for gathering information about learners' progress during everyday teaching. This emerges clearly in the next extract, where he talked about the extent he felt that the other CA tools were not important because the supervisors did not want to see them and thus he had to rely only on portfolios to give marks:

O. Does that mean you sometimes need to adapt your assessment practices according to your supervisors' expectations?

B. Not really, I mean you are asked to do something, if you do something else or if you give time to something else like projects and then nobody is going to ask you about projects, they (supervisors) don't want to see them and you depend only on portfolio to give marks, at the end you have to give marks not notes or feedback or a report, you are not going to write a report about students' progress, just numbers, only

numbers, you need numbers here, so you use portfolio to give marks more than continuous assessment. (B2 9:36)

Badar's reply of "not really" indicates that he did not mean that he follows something suggested by supervisors; it seems that his practices are shaped by own beliefs that the teacher should only use assessment tools which would be checked by supervisors. For example, although Badar stated earlier (see 6.3.4) that he used projects, he thought here that they are not important if supervisors would not ask about them. Therefore, as his comments above reveal, such beliefs probably made Badar emphasise the act of summative purposes of assessment rather than the formative purposes.

Interestingly, Badar, once again, pointed to his total reliance on portfolios at the end "to give marks" (fill in the records) rather than doing CA. Also, as I illustrated earlier in 6.2, although Badar said that CA is a more effective tool in assessing learners, his practice above of using portfolios summatively contradicts that stated belief.

I discuss below Badar's main reliance on portfolios.

### **6.3.6 Focus on portfolios**

In the following Badar emphasized the use of portfolios because he felt that they were the only thing the supervisors would check:

O. If continuous assessment is used as it is intended by the ministry of education, do you think it will achieve its aims?

B. I think most teachers are confused because when you read the specification for each course and how to assess students, you can read about different tools. Even the supervisors when they come to schools they focus on portfolios, they want to see portfolios, so teachers only focus on portfolios. (B2 11:26)

Badar thought that there was a common confusion among teachers because although they read about different assessment techniques in the CA specifications, supervisors only focus on portfolios when they visit the teachers. This large emphasis on portfolios by supervisors, as his comments suggest, thus makes him use them as the only assessment tool. However, Badar's understanding of supervisors' focus on portfolios seems inaccurate. Badar seemed to be referring to the formal Moderation Committee (see 1.4.3) here when he talked about supervisors (the members of this Committee are supervisors from all subjects including two supervisors of English). This Committee visits teachers at the end of each semester for inspection of the CA marks awarded by them before the

marks are to be finalized and submitted. During this visit, each teacher is required to present samples of learners' work (and other kinds of evidence) for inspection and to keep the evidence in a formal moderation file to be easily accessible on the day of the visit. Badar also seemed to be referring to the formal moderation files when talking about portfolios because, based on my experience as a former supervisor who participated in this Committee, supervisors mainly check those files (due to lack of time) by selecting them randomly and comparing the evidence in the files with the marks awarded in the CA records. Thus, as also revealed above, his beliefs in the necessity of only focusing on the files which were expected to be seen by the Committee were, once again, influenced by his personal concern of providing evidence to this formal Moderation Committee. As we saw earlier in Case 1 (see 5.3), the activities of this Committee appear to have a significant influence on teachers' beliefs and practices of CA. This emerges clearly in the next quote.

I asked Badar whether this practice of only focusing on portfolios was promoted by supervisors:

Yes, I mean supervisors, even for Grade 12, when they come at the end, they only check portfolios, even if you did some projects, you can't have them in students' portfolios. Ok I check projects or students did a poster in the class, but they don't count at the end, even daily observation, even the information you collect during oral feedback to students, at the end they (supervisors) need portfolios. (B2 10:18)

Once again, Badar's statement, "when they come at the end, they only check portfolios," explains clearly that Badar was talking about the formal Moderation Committee (because supervisory visits to teachers usually happen all through the year and not mainly for evaluative purposes). The teacher's assessment practices seemed to be influenced by the evaluative behaviour of this Committee and largely by his belief about providing evidence to it. Even though Badar appeared to be aware of the different CA tools to assess his learners (e.g. projects, posters, daily observation, learning journal and collect information during teaching), his concern of keeping evidence appeared to affect his use of those tools for CA.

Below Badar explains his practice of keeping evidence of learners' work in the portfolios (formal moderation files):

First, Badar used portfolios as a file for keeping all types of the learners' work:

I ask them to put everything in their portfolios even if they get zero. They have to keep it there; they shouldn't move it out from their portfolios, just to remind them and remind me and I can see the improvement in what they are doing. For example, if I have three different writing: I can check at the beginning of the class or the semester how much they improved in certain skills, so keep everything in their portfolios. They always have some tasks and there are icons in their books (icons suggest for students to put the outcomes of the tasks in their portfolios); they know that this should go to our portfolios, so they know that I am going to assess them like formal assessment. Not only formal, also informal. (B1 13:56)

B. Formal and informal, yeah. They keep everything, even their projects they keep them in their portfolios; it's a safe place to keep their work, even for projects. (B1 12:03)

The quote above explains the confusion that Badar had about portfolios, as discussed above. While portfolios are an on-going selection of work done by the learner which is representative of what he has achieved, Badar considered it as a file to keep all work done by the learner.

Second, as a record of the learners' work to refer to it in the next lessons:

O. OK, again you talked (in the lesson) to your students about their portfolios; I didn't get that clearly, would you please explain more for me?

B. I asked them to do homework, to label a skeleton, it's a part of their work, they put it in their portfolio, a kind of words, vocabulary, grammar learning. They are going to use it maybe tomorrow again, so they keep it in their portfolios to use it again and it's a kind of a record of their work. (B2 30:12)

Third, as a main source of evidence of learning for the purpose of awarding grades:

When awarding grades I mainly look at portfolios, mainly. I rely on them so when I, for example, when I decide to give them grades, I open their portfolios to find evidence of learning. For example, if I am looking for evaluative writing, I try to find some work they did and I give them marks according to their portfolios. (B2 29:04)

The above quote explains further Badar's practice of using portfolios mainly for summative purpose of awarding marks after checking the evidence of learning collected through other tools and which were kept in the portfolios for later reference at the end of the semester. Also as we can see from Badar's multiple uses of portfolios, Badar perhaps adapted this CA tool (portfolios) to match his own beliefs about using it in his own classroom. Thus, besides his behaviour of using portfolios to satisfy his beliefs of doing

something that would be checked by supervisors, he also finds portfolios suitable to meet several necessary needs in the classroom.

Also, Badar in the following quote adopts portfolios as a solution for the time factor which is associated with CA implementation:

O. Ok, regarding the time, I mean, do you have sufficient time for doing CA?

B. During the lesson?

O. During the lesson, outside the lesson, preparation for assessment, following-up you students' progress?

B. I usually rely on their portfolios, sometimes they keep them, and sometimes I ask them once a week to give me their portfolios to check them and sometimes in two week times, but they know I am going to check them at any time. So they try to keep them ready for assessment. At any time I ask them to bring their portfolios; I make sure they have all their work in their portfolios. (B2 22:23)

#### **6.4 Support for implementing CA**

Disregarding their role in the formal Moderation Committee (as I illustrated above in 6.3.6), supervisors, throughout the year, are required to provide support and guidance during their supervisory visits to teachers of English in all aspects of teaching and learning including CA and also to follow-up training (see 1.4.3). I asked Badar if he gets sufficient support from supervisors regarding CA implementation:

No, not really, they always come to classes not for assessment, not for how you assess students, they just look at students' portfolios, and at their marks and are you giving activities to students to check their progress, I think they do it this way. Mainly they talk to you about portfolios but they don't do things like telling you about some new things or guiding you to do something else, we don't have that. (B2 11:26)

Badar seemed to be, once again, very concerned about what supervisors usually check during their visits to schools. As we have seen many times in this analysis, his responses always included concerns that supervisors always focus on portfolios and thus he depends on them as a main assessment tool (see, B2 10:39, B2 10:18 & B2 22:23, for example). His justification here and also in the examples above may also reveal his attempts to defend his position, during the interview, for the lack of doing CA.

When I asked Badar if he had received sufficient training sessions to support his implementation of CA, he commented:

B. Yeah, only at the beginning, they gave us training but they didn't follow-up. This is the problem.

O. So the problem with the follow-up?

B. Yeah, they don't follow-up, they gave us training, for example, on using, conducting research, we did that but no one came to follow-up conducting research in that school or not.

O. I am talking about assessment?

B. Even assessment, like the training we had nine years ago, I am sure there are so many things to learn or to refresh our minds. Sometimes you say oh, we really need that training, to attend some sessions about assessment because you find some teachers really confused, they don't know how to do evaluative writing, they don't know how to evaluate, for example, certain skills, how to evaluate, even how to conduct formal tests. (B2 6:26)

From his reply to the first question, it seems that training for CA was not a concern for Badar. Throughout the two interviews, Badar did not point to a need for training or for support regarding CA which possibly indicates that his comments about the need for training here were just post hoc rationalization. Nevertheless, Badar had his first CA training nine years ago which seems to be another contextual factor that probably might have influenced his behaviour of not using CA as we have seen in this analysis. After that long period of lack of training, it is very likely that Badar did not have the skills to carry out CA and understand the rationale behind it.

## **6.5 Summary**

There seems to be a large gap between Badar's beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaire and confirmed in the follow-up interviews and his actual CA practices. Badar showed minimal explicit commitment to CA implementation. Thus, within a broad framework of CA, he used a number of CA tools which reflect the particular official procedure suggested by the CA guidelines, yet the contributions of those tools to CA of learners were not evident. The absence of keeping ongoing records and his main reliance on assessing summatively by using evidence from the learners' portfolios were two key features of Badar's assessment practices, though both practices were not consistent with the intended CA of assessing continuously with the main aim of supporting learning.

Badar also modified some required CA practices in order to match his beliefs about how CA should be implemented in practice.

The analysis showed that there were various factors influencing Badar's putting his strong beliefs about CA into practice. These factors were mainly related to his own attitude towards the required CA practices and his tendency to do what was easy and more familiar to him rather than adopting the official procedures. Other contextual factors also emerged as influences on the relationship between Badar's stated beliefs and his actual practice such as the influence of peer teachers' (or teachers from the larger community) assessment practices, the Moderation Committee and insufficient CA training. Another major issue which emerged in the analysis is that Badar seemed to be making real-time justifications during the interview to defend his position of not implementing CA as required by the official guidelines and to avoid losing face during the interview.



## **CHAPTER 7: CASE 3 ALZAHRA**

### **7.1 Introduction**

At the time of the study Alzahra had been teaching English for six years. Alzahra was one of six English teachers working in a Cycle 2 school for girls located about 10km from the city centre of Ibri. She was teaching two levels which consisted of three Grade 8 and one Grade 12. I observed Alzahra on two occasions in Grade 8/1 in which the learners were aged between 13 and 14 years and had already finished seven years of studying English: four years at the Cycle 1 and three years at the Cycle 2. At the time of the observations there were 22 learners in the class and they were sitting in five groups. Alzahra had her CA training during the Cycle 2 Training Course in 2010 and as she stated in the questionnaire that the training was 'brief explanations of marks distribution and portfolios'.

The following sections first present Alzahra's practices from the lessons I observed with her and from her own comments on her work. I then proceed to comment on the extent to which Alzahra's practices reflect her stated beliefs about CA and the required practices of CA. For the purpose of relating Alzahra's beliefs to her practices I will first provide a brief summary of her beliefs derived from her comments in the interview on her strong responses to the questionnaire statements presented in Chapter 4.

### **7.2 Summary of Alzahra's beliefs about CA**

Section two in the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) aimed to compare the level of CA beliefs and traditional assessment beliefs of the questionnaire participants (see details in 3.10.2 and Table 9). Alzahra was among the second group of participants who clearly had strong positive beliefs about CA, but at the same time they also believed strongly in traditional assessment: she scored 4.5 out of 5 for CA beliefs and 3.7 out of 5 for traditional assessment beliefs (see code 30 in Table 9). In the follow-up interviews, Alzahra was asked to comment on her strong responses to some of those statements in section two of the questionnaire about both CA and traditional assessment (presented in Chapter 4). The following is a summary of her beliefs derived from her comments on those responses:

- Assessment should be based on a variety of assessment methods.
- CA involves a variety of assessment techniques and its ongoing process provides learners with ample opportunities to improve their performance and gain better results.
- Using a variety of assessment techniques allows the teacher to have clear idea about learners' actual progress.
- Self-assessment is important to increase learners' awareness of their weaknesses if they do it honestly.
- The learning process benefits from providing regular feedback to parents on the basis of their children's CA.
- Informing learners about the criteria they are assessed against make learners aware of the nature of assessment.
- Final exams should not be used as the only form of assessment, though teachers should emphasize test-taking strategies in the class to prepare learners for them.
- Learners' results in the final exams can be used to evaluate teachers' effectiveness in teaching.

Having shed light on the main beliefs that Alzahra stated, as reported in the questionnaire and confirmed in the follow-up interviews, the following sections present Alzahra's practices and relate them to those beliefs and the other beliefs emerging from her rationale on her actual practices.

### **7.3 General understanding of CA implementation**

Many times throughout the interviews Alzahra expressed a positive attitude towards CA rather than assessment at the end of the learning process. In the following quote, Alzahra expressed a feeling that CA is more beneficial for her learners than the final exam:

CA is better because you don't know the circumstances in the final exam. CA has many skills, for example, speaking, reading, and many ways to assess these skills; for example, here in speaking: presentations and interactions. If they don't do well in presentation, I can give them marks in participations. Also, I told them, for example, the same thing in reading: they have reading at home and reading in the class, so if they don't do well in reading in the class, they can compensate in the reading at home. So this variety can help them to collect as much marks as they can and also can help them meet different things, different books, different information, different vocabulary, and different grammar from what they have done in the school. For example, they read in books independent reading. So I think it (CA) has a variety, so

the students can collect many marks. But, the final exam just has questions and the students have to answer them by doing one thing is studying the book. (Az1 13:52)

Alzahra appeared to have a positive attitude towards CA and her comments indicate an awareness that CA involves a variety of assessment techniques which provide learners with ample opportunities to improve their performance and compensate for earlier weaknesses. The variety that CA involves, according to Alzahra, also increases the fairness of the assessment, the factor which is not possible in the final exam. This attitude towards CA and final exams expressed here matches her stated beliefs about CA (see 7.2). However, Alzahra here emphasised only the role of CA in helping learners to get marks from different sources during the learning process but she did not pay attention to the role of CA in supporting learning. This may indicate a possible misunderstanding on her part that CA is a procedure for collecting marks rather than an assessment approach which can provide information for both summative and formative purposes.

#### **7.4 Planning for CA**

In the assessment section of her lesson plans (LP) Alzahra put the following notes: 'placement test' (LP1, Code 30), 'individual responses' (LP1, Code 30), 'pair work' (LP1, Code 30), 'teacher monitors individual responses and group work' (LP2, Code 30). I asked her if she had anticipated in her planning for that particular lesson I observed with her or before going to the class any opportunities for CA of her learners. She responded in this way:

A. You mean, for example, assessing specific skills?

O. Yes, assessing specific skills or assessing any specific student in that class.

A. Now in these two weeks, I am assessing their participation in the class; you missed that part when the class asked me about the best group today. Ok, at the end of each lesson we just give them like paints (coloured plastic pieces), so the group who will collect the most or as many paints as they could, they will be the winner and will be gifted in the morning assembly; they will be given gifts. Sometimes, yes I just record as, for example, I assess their speaking sometimes, so I mark in the record sheet.

O. So do you put it down in your CA records?

A. Yes. (Az1 37:56)

Alzahra's lesson plan notes (see LP2 above) and her comments suggest that her planning for CA involved assessing participation of learners during a period of two weeks. Her comments were mainly about the participation competition between groups in which she aimed to motivate the learners to participate more during the lesson. However, it is not apparent in her comments how that participation competition contributes to CA of individual learners in speaking. Also, as her comments suggest, recording the assessment outcomes of speaking in the CA records seemed to be given less consideration in her planning for assessment.

Considering her note in the lesson plan: 'teacher monitors individual responses and group work' (see LP2 above), I asked her if she had planned to observe or to follow-up any specific learners' progress in speaking according to the information she had in her CA records and also whether she anticipated any CA opportunities when planning the speaking activities. She replied: '(Laugh) actually it is a great idea; no, I don't do that' (Az1 36:16).

Interestingly, her response here indicates that the required CA procedures I mentioned in my question were not part of her thinking when planning for teaching. Her words here indicate that Alzahra was not aware of such CA procedures of planning for CA. Her laugh and admiring of the procedures may be due to a lack of confidence on her part as she perhaps was not expecting the question. Thus, the assessment notes she had included in the assessment section of her lesson preparation book might be just to meet formal requirements as this book is usually checked by officials when they visit schools. Also, it could be due to my visit to her classroom as she might have just filled it in to impress me.

## **7.5 Keeping informal records of CA**

Alzahra illustrated earlier in (Az1 36:16) that CA was not part of her thinking when planning for teaching. I asked her further questions about whether she considers CA during normal teaching, regardless whether she thinks about it during the planning stage or not:

O. Ok, but, do you do it, I mean, not intentionally, but when you are in the class and , for example, Suad has made some contributions today, so do you record some comments about her progress?

A. Yes, some of them, especially if they have made great improvement in that thing; for example, I have a student in the other class who have made a great improvement in her participation, so I recorded that as a

remark so it can help me to give her the mark, the final mark Insha'Allah. But, most of the time I put ticks or give marks as I have done today, for example, I will give you two marks if you tell this.

O. Yeah, I noticed that; you gave that student two marks because of her participation and because she was the only student who was able to answer your question. (Az1 36:11)

As her comments above suggest, Alzahra does not write comments about her learners' progress on a regular basis. She only writes comments occasionally when she notices a remarkable improvement in their progress and this helps her to make decision about the final mark; yet, as she stated above, she mainly puts ticks or writes marks to record their achievement. Her comments about those two required practices indicate that taking notes was reduced to the use of ticks and writing marks.

The practice of putting ticks happened once during the two lessons I observed with Alzahra: one learner was able to answer her question and she picked up her record and said to the learner 'I will give you two marks' (Az Observation Schedule 1). This practice could be also due to my presence as she probably meant to show during the lesson that she was doing CA. Also, she reminded me of this incident in the interview: 'But, most of the time I put ticks or give marks as I have done today' (Az1 36:11).

Later on, Alzahra showed me her CA record sheet which consists of a column of the learners' names and other columns for awarding marks for the language skills and their sub skills (see appendix 16). She put ticks and crosses in the speaking skill column and marks in the reading and writing columns whereas some columns for some sub skills were left uncompleted. This practice of filling in this CA record sheet matches what she said above of putting ticks or writing marks to record the learners' achievement. However, it does not seem to reflect the required procedure of keeping regular notes about learners' performance. Alzahra did not relate her behaviour here to any contextual factors; however, in doing this superficial implementation of record keeping, she could have meant to adapt it in order to suit the circumstances in her classroom or may be due to a probable difficulty of taking notes about every individual learner in her three classes.

I further explored the issue of keeping record of CA bearing in mind the comment in her lesson plan about observing learners (see 7.4).

O. So do you use observation to collect information about your students?

A. Yes.

O. And do you keep a record for that information?

A. Yes.

O. You said earlier that you go around for the purpose of observing your students and noticing their difficulties, is that correct?

A. Yes.

O. and later on do you keep a record of these things?

A. Maybe I don't keep records in that way, what I have is a blank sheet for recording their achievements for most of the time. But I don't write what is wrong with that student for example,

O. Ok, how do you do it then?

A. I keep it in my mind, yes. What I have written in my blank sheet here is the progress I notice or any special thing they made in the class so just I use it when I award marks and if I need anything I refer to it. (Az1 31:12)

Alzahra's position here reflects little confidence about using observation to collect information about her learners' performance. Her words "maybe I don't keep records in that way" and "I keep it in my mind" indicate a lack of attention towards using this official procedure in her class although she probably avoided revealing it directly during the interview. Furthermore, the information recorded in Alzahra's notes (see appendix 17) does not seem to match her comments about using them to record the 'special thing' the learners made in the class as she stated in the quote. There was also little evidence that those records were kept systematically and up-to-date for all learners. Thus, all those incidents here imply lack of attention on her part for using this CA requirement.

## **7.6 Using CA information for formative purposes**

As noted earlier in 1.4, teachers are expected to use the information gathered through CA formatively to improve learning. I asked Alzahra if she uses CA information for formative purposes.

O. Actually, what about if you have some certain students in the class who are not participating well and who are not taking part in the lesson; do you keep an eye of those students and in your CA records, do you record their names and later on you design some specific tasks for them?

A. yes, I gave them remedial tasks, but not all of them of course, they have told us (instructions from the ministry) to give only pupils who are

so weak ok, if I am allowed to say weak; yes, but most of my students are participating in my class and if there is a case, ok I just motivate her to participate even by picking her to participate and to know if she's going to give me the answer. (A1 34:55)

Alzahra's reply here shows how aware she was of the CA guidelines' instructions of giving remedial tasks to learners who are weak, and she tried here to emphasise that she had already done it perhaps due to my presence. Although my question was about using CA to identify slow learners and then to consider them in future planning, her comments above imply that this CA requirement is less important for her as she did not see the point of doing it with her class - she felt that most of her learners were participating. Perhaps, she sees the process of identifying slow learners through the CA procedure is demanding for her.

I furthered explored the issue of using the CA outcomes for informing teaching:

O. So in your normal teaching, do you use CA to collect information about your students' learning?

A. About their participation for example?

O. About their participation, about their overall progress; do you collect information?

A. Yeah, yeah.

O. and do you use these information to inform your teaching; I mean, for example, do you design some specific things for those students because they didn't do well in this particular area, so you need to do something else; do you normally do that?

A. Yes, it's from our work I think; yes, we have to do this; every teacher has to do such things. So if a student has difficulties in writing, for example, what I have to do in my lesson is to ask all students to work in groups to write a paragraph. Then after that they write themselves, the mixed period (a period specified to improve students' writing), they write themselves and, of course, also what I manage to do in the writing (period) is to call those students to come, so I can help them to correct their mistakes in the sentences. (Az1 32:33)

Alzahra's first reply shows that she was not quite sure about the procedure of using CA to inform teaching. Thus, in this case, her comments which followed my explanation were probably based on real time reflection. The next quote provides further evidence of her minimum consideration to collect information as a part of CA and then to use it for formative purposes.

O. About remedial plans, do you keep a record of remedial plans?

A. Yes

O. And do you have a list of weak students and a list of outstanding students?

A. We have the lists and we keep them always with the senior teacher.

O. So, is it just (keeping remedial plans) for formal purposes, just to show them to supervisors, head teacher and senior teacher?

A. laughs... Really, I don't care about the formal sheets, I know my students very much because I've been teaching them for 3 years now: in Grade 5, 6, and 8. So, I fully understand their abilities... (Az2 14:57)

As the quote above suggests, the information that Alzahra had about her learners was based on a long experience of dealing with them rather than on a systematic gathering of information through CA. It seems from her comments (and laugh) that she is quite dismissive of the CA procedure, and confident in her own judgements. This apparent attitude here could have contributed to her behaviour of not keeping constant, on-going record of her learners' CA, as we saw above in 7.5.

## **7.7 Exploiting CA opportunities during teaching**

As recommended in SAH (see 1.4), one of the techniques used for investigating the learning outcomes is by means of classroom interaction. Through this technique the teacher is required to investigate and find out what learners actually know, understand and can do and at the same time to keep informal record of brief, spontaneous notes on learner performances which occur during this process. In the lessons I observed with Alzahra, I noticed that the classroom interaction was mainly teacher-centred and the interaction was limited only with the learners who volunteered. Also, I did not notice any note taking during those lessons. I asked her the following questions:

O. Regarding individual responses, I noticed that most of the participation was a kind of interaction between you and students; do you make use of this interaction for the purpose of CA?

A. You mean to give marks?

O. Not only marks.

A. to collect information about students?

O. Yeah, to collect information about students?

A. Yeah, of course, so from the participation I know this student is eager to learn, for example. From her participation, from her willingness to participate, yes I can get this information from their



participation. I think participation can do a lot for teacher to collect various information: one of them is how they are willing to study and learn; this is the important thing I think. (Az1 28:21)

Alzahra's first response, once again, implies lack of awareness of the CA strategy of exploiting the classroom interaction for CA purposes. Her words 'You mean to give marks?' indicate that she probably had less awareness about this procedure before my question. Thus, in this case, her agreement on the importance of using learners' participation to know about their willingness to study could be to secure her position during the interview and to show her awareness of using classroom interaction. Also, her comments imply that she does think she is collecting information about the learners, only not in the officially sanctioned way.

Alzahra selected some learners deliberately to answer her questions. I asked her about this:

O. What about selecting students deliberately? I noticed that you were selecting students but I didn't know whether you were selecting them deliberately for the purpose of assessing them or not.

A. Yes, I tried to give chance for all students so, for example, if I forget that this student has just answered, I just change it to the other one to give chance.

O. Did you select them for the purpose of assessing them? For example, you select one particular student for something in your mind about her and you want to know whether she's able to answer or not.

A. Honestly, it is not for assessing specific skills but to know if she has got what I have taught her; mainly this is the purpose when I choose students for participation. (Az1 27:22)

It seems that adopting the CA official procedure was not part of her thinking when selecting the learners; yet, she does think that she meant to check their understanding of what had been taught.

As I illustrated in 7.4, Alzahra put some notes in the assessment section of her lesson plans, I asked her about this:

O. You listed here (in the assessment part of the lesson plan) several assessment tools: placement test, we have just talked about it; individual responses, we talked about it yesterday. About pair work and group work, how do you use them for the purpose of assessment?

A. To know how they work together; it is more obvious, for example. It is not pair work, it is checking, checking answers only. (Az2 33:41)

Building pair work/group work activities into each lesson and observe learners closely during these activities for the purpose of CA is one of the requirements of the CA guidelines. It seems here that Alzahra was not alert to using group work or pair work in the official sanctioned way. Her comments here seem to be evidence of a desire to prioritize helping her learners as this seems to be her pre-eminent task and assessment is a secondary consideration.

## **7.8 How to arrive at CA marks**

I clarified from Alzahra about the procedure she follows to arrive at CA marks. First, I asked her about the percentage of CA:

A. The final exam is 60% and CA is 40%.

O. Ok, 40% for CA.

A. Laugh, no, no, the opposite, 60 % for CA and 40 % for the final exam. (Az1 19:12)

In Grade 8, which I observed with her, the assessment system includes three components, each with a specified number of marks: 40% marks for CA conducted by the teacher during everyday classroom teaching, 20% for class tests prepared and administered by the teacher during the semester and 40% for semester tests prepared at a regional level and administered at the end of each semester. In the above reply, Alzahra added the 20% of class tests to the percentage of CA.

I asked her to explain the procedure she uses to arrive to the 60% as follows:

O. How do you arrive to this 60%? Do you collect information about students regularly and then you change them into marks and so you do it as a cumulative process?

A. Could I explain it using this one (the CA sheet)?

O. Yes, of course.

A. The twenty marks here are just for tests, so these 20 marks considering their efforts, I don't have anything to do with them. They have to study at home and just to come and do their best (in the tests). (Az118:28)

Alzahra's comments here indicate her awareness that class tests are not part of CA and thus she awards the 20 marks according to the learners' achievement in those tests.

Regarding CA of writing, Alzahra's explanation was (she explained using the CA sheet):

Narrative and evaluative writings (pointing to the column in the CA sheet: 5 marks for narrative writing and 5 marks for evaluative) are also for writing (to assess learners' writing), the same thing I have the procedure to make them write at the class. (Az1 18:23)

To award the ten marks for writing, Alzahra asks the learners to do two types of writing: narrative and evaluative. As her comments suggest, she seems to make her learners do this writing in the class, though the official procedure requires teachers to assess different drafts of learners' writing over the semester and give them feedback. Also her words 'the same thing' may suggest that she probably applies the same procedure of class tests to assess writing (see her comments in (Az118:28) about class tests). Furthermore, my observation of Alzahra was in the middle of the second semester, at that time Alzahra had already filled the marks in the narrative writing column (see appendix 16). Awarding marks at that time of semester might suggest that she possibly was not monitoring her learners' writing over the semester to arrive at their final achievement in the writing skill. Alzahra, in this case, had made changes in the official procedure of assessing writing, perhaps, due to the large number of learners (22 learners and had 4 classes) in her class and the burden of following-up individual learners' writing all through the semester.

Regarding CA of reading, Alzahra continued her explanation using the CA sheet:

Ok, and we have independent reading; they have to do (independent reading) at home and they have also understanding texts here (in the class). I do it as a quiz for them (to assess their reading) and if I notice that, for example, an excellent student get 3 out of 5, which is a low mark of her level, so what I should do, I can do this reading text.... (Az1 18:17)

Although Alzahra seems to be aware of the required CA procedure of assessing learners by independent reading at home, she stated here that she checks their reading in the class by quizzes. Once again, Alzahra made changes in the official CA technique probably due to the suitability of quizzes for her class more than independent reading. Although she did not disclose here the reason for doing so, it could be due to the fact that learners tend to ask others to do the reading tasks for them. Therefore, Alzahra's previous experience with her learners perhaps had led her to believe that assessing them in the class under her control was more beneficial for them, as we have seen in the case study of Muhanad. This reason can also apply for her behaviour of assessing their learners' writing in the class as we have seen above in her comments about writing.

She elaborated on how she assesses reading:

What you are asking me, the question you asked me now, I haven't thought about it before (referring to my question above) because I have done like this (collect information about learners); for example, I collect information about this student and I know what she is doing in the class...If they have many reading tasks, I go for the easiest one and I just let them do it by themselves. Then, I order them (the reading tasks) into numbers (from the most difficult '1' to the easiest '5'). After that I do a competition: who's (reading) number 1, 2, 3, or 5. Ok, for example, who reads many times (number) one, I know she's excellent in reading but in that specific test she hasn't done very well so I can help her to give her marks. (Az1 18:02)

Alzahra meant here to explain for me that she is doing something similar to the technique of collecting information that I am asking her about. Her comments, once again, are evidence of a desire to prioritize helping her learners. She sees that as her pre-eminent task and following the official procedure is a secondary consideration.

With regard to CA of speaking, Alzahra continued her explanation using the CA sheet:

A. Also, the only thing I have hand on is the presentations, they are doing them (presentations) by themselves. And I have 10 marks for me, Ok 10 marks (for their participation in the class), as you see, I just add to them marks if they participate very well, and most of the time I put ticks for them.

O. Ok, regarding presentations, do you rely on presentation to assess their speaking?

A. Yeah.

O. Only presentation? What about their normal classroom participation?

A. That's interactive (classroom interaction); the interaction has 10 marks, so this is what I have hand for 10 marks, but the five marks are for their work, for presentations. To assess their speaking (assess their interaction in the class) so I think my work is to assess them for 10 marks. (Az1 17:42)

Alzahra's words 'I just add to them marks if they participate very well' indicate an immediate action by the teacher of assessing speaking at one particular point. Her comments here do not appear to reflect regularity in tracking learners' speaking over time as required by the CA guidelines.

## **7.9 Self-assessment**

As suggested in SAH, as a part of CA teachers are encouraged to pay close attention to what is revealed by learners' self-assessments and combine it together with other

outcomes of CA to have diagnostic information about learners. I asked Alzahra if she exploits her learners' self-assessment for the purpose of gathering information about their learning:

A. I found it very important because the student can see, if she does it honestly, she can know the weakness area, so she can improve it, improve herself in that area.

O. Do you use it in your classes with your students?

A. I ask them yes, but I don't give them questionnaires or at the end of the class. I did it with Grade 5 and 6 yes, but in this year, no. For example, not as a questionnaire or as things written in the book but what I do in the class is to just ask them: what they have learned, Ok; what they found difficult; what they like about the lesson, for example. I can ask them like these oral questions.

O. So do you talk to students about the difficulties they have and then you try to help them with those difficulties?

A. Yes, yes. (Az1 6:27)

In her comments here about using oral questions Alzahra seems to be avoiding being direct about the absence of self-assessment in her work. As she stated above, she did not make use of self-assessment instruments such as questionnaires or learning journal (though both are available in the learners' course book). Her explanation here indicates that she was aware of the intended CA procedure of using questionnaires and learning journals; yet it seems that asking the learners to complete them in the official sanctioned way is not her preferred method: 'not as a questionnaire or as things written in the book but what I do in the class is to just ask them'. Thus, Alzahra probably referred here to the burden of implementing this CA procedure.

### **7.10 Learners' portfolios**

As suggested in SAH, looking after portfolios should be the learners' responsibility. However, it is suggested that portfolios should be considered by the teacher as a source for CA, which shows learners' progress over time. The teacher is required to consider the material in the portfolio as further evidence of the learner's abilities in the learning outcomes. I asked Alzahra whether she usually considers learners' portfolios for CA of her learners:

O. Ok, about students' portfolios, do they keep such portfolios and do you make use of them for the purpose of CA?

A. Yes, they have portfolios.

O. Do you make use of those portfolios; for example...?

A. My students put (in their portfolios) what, for example, I tested them in, the writing I give them, yes and I keep recording them (the materials that students put in their portfolios) in my registers. After that, they just keep them in their portfolios, so these (students' work) I put them as evidence in their portfolios and when anybody asks about the student, for example, their parents about such things.

O. so do you use them (portfolios) for...?

A. for evidence

O. as feedback to parents?

A. Yes, for parents because most of the time their parents have to sign their children work. But I keep on recording them on my registers, so I don't have to go back again to that portfolio.

O. so you immediately shift the information to your records?

A. So not to do the work twice. (Az1 05:02)

Alzahra stated here that she keeps recording in her registers the materials that her learners put in their portfolios so that she would not need to check them again. Awarding marks to learners' work and then not returning to it does not seem to reflect the on-going process of CA of following-up learners' progress over time. The quote above indicates a probable alteration Alzahra made in this suggested procedure of CA, perhaps, due to the large number in her class or due to the difficulty of applying it in practice. While portfolios are an on-going selection of work done by the learner which the teacher is expected to check on a regular basis, Alzahra viewed it as a file for learners to keep all their work including that which she had already tested them on. Thus, Alzahra's main intention, as her words suggest, appears to be on keeping evidence for authorities and parents when they ask about learners' achievement.

### **7.11 Alzahra's understanding of CA**

We have seen in the discussion above that despite her strong beliefs about CA in the questionnaire and in the follow-up interviews, Alzahra was less clear about what CA meant in practice. In the interviews, Alzahra expressed a concern that she was not fully aware of the different CA tools:

A. Actually we need a lecture in assessment (laugh) because we apply tools of assessment but we don't know if it is included in the assessment or not.

O. So you think you are not fully....

A. Yeah, not fully captured the word assessment.

O. So why is that? Why you think that you don't have that full understanding of CA?

A. Maybe we haven't practiced it a lot practically and theoretically in universities and here. Also, what they cared about here in schools is exams and these things. We have made here in school many workshops about assessment but just to explain what the sheets includes, for example. (Az2 25:07)

The analysis above seems to suggest that Alzahra was not paying much attention to the CA requirements. However, although she was frank here about her lack of understanding of CA, she related this gap in her competence to the lack of training rather than to her attitude of paying lip service to Ministry requirements.

I asked her further questions about the workshops she mentioned in the previous quote:

O. So was it only about awarding marks not about using other assessment tools like observation?

A. Yeah, yeah, and now I am in the sixth year in teaching and maybe this long time has taken a lot from our memories.

O. When did you last have training about CA?

A. I had post-basic course but also in that course they showed us the sheet.

O. So, it wasn't a full course about using CA?

A. Yes, so it is a good idea to have like this course. (Az2 24:22)

Once again, Alzahra was trying here to provide justifications for her lack of competency in implementing CA. She related it here to her short memory and to a problem in training as she felt that it only focuses on explaining the CA sheet (she repeated this remark about training for the second time). Alzahra's justifications here (and in the quote above) may be due to the pressure of the interview as she was probably avoiding revealing the absence of CA in her work.

I asked whether she gets support regarding CA from other recourses:

O. What about the support you get from inside the school, from the senior teacher for example?

A. What kind of support?

O. I mean regarding CA; of course there were some courses conducted this year and last year; I think your senior teacher attended those courses?

A. Yeah, about the same point, about the assessment sheet only, about the sheet.

O. So did she (senior teacher) cascade the training to you? Did she talk about what she has attended?

A. Yeah, yeah, yes she had made a workshop in the school and the most important thing was to show us the sheet.

O. The sheet? Tell me about this sheet?

A. The CA and the marks of the final exams and the marks of the CA: reading, speaking (distribution of marks among CA and final exams).

O. so it was about...

A. (It was about) the changes in the assessment sheet. (Az2 23:32)

The teacher, once again, repeated the same justifications in that the training only focuses on the changes in the sheets for awarding marks. It seems that she wanted here to emphasise during the interview that her lack of understanding of the CA requirements and thus the absence of these requirements in her practice were something beyond her control. The next quote provides further evidence of this:

O. Ok, so the focus was on the changes and about awarding marks, was there anything about using CA effectively with the students?

A. yeah, she told us how to use it (CA) effectively by giving them (students) independent reading for example, like this. But, for example, never spoken about the areas I can collect information about students' participation, how should I distribute marks, or what marks I can give the students for example. So the elements that I talked about yesterday only (She talked about training only focuses on the changes in the sheets for awarding marks). (Az2 22:35)

The teacher once more blamed the training for not focusing on how CA should be implemented in practice. Although this is an important aspect of CA implementation, it seems that the teacher here was trying to provide reasons for her incompetence in some CA procedures which she, perhaps, felt unable to show evidence of them during the observations and interviews: "never spoken about the areas I can collect information about students' participation, how should I distribute marks".



I asked her if she usually takes the initiative to inform herself about CA rather than waiting for the in-service training:

O. So, if you don't get that much support from training, I mean from the senior teacher here; what do you usually do to improve your performance regarding CA as a teacher?

A. As a teacher I apply techniques (CA techniques) but they are not so clear 100% for me, OK, now I will go to the internet and find more information about assessment; this is my intention Insha'Allah.

O. Ok, so what about the assessment document (assessment handbook), you know about it?

A. Actually I read about it yesterday (laugh).

O. Just yesterday?

A. Yes

O. Do you refer to that assessment document from time to time?

A. The document about providing new information about assessment?

O. Yes.

A. No

O. You know, there is one document provided by the Ministry of Education and should be kept in the school with the senior teacher and each teacher should have a CD of that document through which she can revise or refer to.....

A. Ah, yeah. You mean that document which includes 300 pages (laugh).

O. What is it?

A. Three hundred pages... (laugh)

O. So, is it time consuming?

A. Yes, we check them (assessment handbook) honestly; we check them with the senior teacher in the laptop only for Grade 8.

O. Because you are teaching Grade 8?

A. Yes, Grade 8 because it takes time to read all the materials there. (A22 21:31)

Two issues emerge here. Firstly, once again, justifications for lack of understanding of CA: the teacher probably, due to the pressure of the interview, tried to find excuses for herself, as she was aware she should be using the handbook. Secondly, lack of commitment to use the official guidelines of CA. This attitude here of not using the

guidelines could have developed due to her feeling that use of the CA handbook was not feasible due to its very theoretical content and its length. However, despite the reasons Alzahra provided here, she seemed to have no intention to use the handbook because of her lack of interest in the topic.

This emerges clearly in the next quote:

A. To be honest I haven't read it many times, just one time, so I don't remember the things included so, I can't judge it from one time.

O. So you are not referring to it regularly?

A. No, the time she (the senior teacher) showed us at the workshop and the time I search for specifications of the final exam of Grade 8.

O. So you aren't referring to it regarding using CA?

A. yes, but I suppose to. (Az2 19:15)

Alzahra's comments above about referring to the CA guidelines indicate clearly her lack of interest in knowing about CA.

Supervisors are usually the first receivers of training in all aspects of teaching and learning including CA and they are supposed to cascade that training to teachers during their supervisory visits (see 1.4.3). I asked Alzahra if she gets support from supervisors regarding CA:

O. What about the supervisors, do you receive that much support from them regarding CA?

A. laugh...

O. Do they talk about CA? Do they help you?

A. No (Laugh), No actually. What we receive from them, if we receive anything from them, we receive the worksheet.

O. What worksheet?

A. Oh, sorry the sheet of CA and the final exam only. But sometimes we don't even receive it from our supervisor; we have to search for the supervisor (laugh) to give us these sheets.

O So, regarding your school supervisor, you are not getting that much support from her or from him.

F. No, to be honest. (Az2 18:26)

Alzahra indicates here that the role of supervisor in supporting teachers regarding CA implementation was missing. However, despite her comments about the supervisors, her intention here does not seem to blame them but possibly, once again, to justify the absence of CA in her work. A possible explanation of Alzahra's comments about supervisors' lack of commitment could be attributed to a possible kind of co-conspiracy going on, between supervisors and teachers, whereby they both ignore the Ministry guidelines probably due to their attitude towards implementing them and/or so they can get on with what they see as the more important aspects of their job. Her whole attitude seems to be one of scepticism, within a supervisory framework that does not seem very demanding for her.

### **7.12 Summary**

There was little evidence in the data of consistency between Alzahra's strong beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaire and her actual assessment practices. The salient point here is Alzahra's low level of commitment towards CA implementation. Thus, while she superficially used some suggested CA tools, she used them merely due to their formal value. Also the data showed evidence of her desire to prioritize helping her learners, while the official procedure of CA was a secondary consideration in her work. In many places in this account Alzahra tried to justify her lack of commitment to implement CA and her lack of understanding of it to factors which she saw as being beyond her control. This was due to Alzahra's sensitivity during the interviews to articulate her attitudes towards CA.

## **CHAPTER 8: CASE 4 ALWALEED**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Alwaleed was a graduate of the University of Leeds BA TESOL Degree Programme. He had been teaching English for 21 years at the time of the study. Alwaleed was one of six English teachers working in a Cycle 2 school for boys located in the city centre of Ibri and was teaching three levels: Grades 8, 6 and 5. I observed Alwaleed on two occasions in Grade 8/1 in which the learners were aged between 13 and 14 years and had already finished seven years of studying English. In my first observation with Alwaleed's class there were 32 learners and in the second observation there were 34 learners. The learners were sitting in rows facing the board. Alwaleed had his CA training as part of the Cycle 2 Course in 2008.

In the following I first present Alwaleed's practices from the lessons I observed with him and from his own comments on his work in the interviews. I then proceed to comment on the extent to which Alwaleed's practices reflect his beliefs and the intended practices of CA. In order to relate Alwaleed's beliefs to his practices I will first provide a brief summary of his beliefs as reported in the questionnaire and from his comments in the follow-up interviews on some statements in the questionnaire.

### **8.2 Summary of Alwaleed's beliefs about CA**

Alwaleed was among the second group of participants who reported strong positive views of CA, but at the same time were strong in their traditional assessment beliefs (see details in 3.10.2 and Table 9): he scored 4.0 out of 5 for CA beliefs and 3.8 out of 5 for traditional assessment beliefs (see code 13 in Table 9). One of the things that aroused my interest regarding the choice of Alwaleed was to find out why he scored high in both CA and traditional assessment beliefs. Another criterion was his long experience of 21 years in teaching as he witnessed both the old assessment system and the current one (more details of the selection criteria of the qualitative stage participants in 3.10.2). Alwaleed commented in the follow-up interviews on his high responses to some statements in the questionnaire about both CA and traditional assessment; the following is a summary of his beliefs derived from those comments:

- From daily observation and daily dealing with learners I can notice the specific skills a weak learner may be having problems with and what kind of help the learner needs.
- Providing feedback to parents is an important aspect of assessment and should be done through cooperation between parents and teachers.
- Using the CA mark register in the class is a type of threatening act to learners, especially weak learners will feel scared and frustrated.
- Self-assessment is a good way to increase learners' awareness of assessing themselves in many aspects of language learning.
- Using different assessment techniques assist the teacher in assessing individual learners' performances.

The next list of beliefs is based on his high responses to the statements in the questionnaire which he did not comment on. First, strong beliefs about CA:

- The main aim of assessment is understanding learners' progress.
- It is important that assessment take place continuously throughout the year.
- One exam at the end of the year is not the best way to assess learners.
- Teachers need to use the assessment results to improve their teaching.

Second, strong beliefs about traditional assessment:

- Focusing on learners' final achievements is an important function of assessment.
- Ranking learners is an important function of assessment.
- Providing regular feedback to learners on their progress is not an important aspect of assessment.
- Assessment is best conducted at the end of learning process.
- The main aim of assessment is determining learners' final grades.
- An important aim of assessment is evaluating teachers' effectiveness.
- Teachers need to take full control of the assessment process.

Although Alwaleed appears to have strong beliefs about both CA and traditional assessment, it seems there are strong inconsistencies in his views about them. While he expressed strong positive beliefs in favour of CA, there are also many contradictory views, which indicate his strong beliefs about assessing at the end of the learning process. I discuss these contradictions further later on in this chapter.

Having shed light on the main beliefs that Alwaleed had, as reported in the questionnaire and from his comments in the follow-up interviews on some statements in the questionnaire, the following sections present Alwaleed's practices and relate them to those beliefs and the other beliefs emerging from his comments on his practices.

### **8.3 Planning for CA**

Alwaleed did not put any notes regarding assessment in the assessment section of his lesson plans. I asked him if he usually thinks about opportunities for CA when planning for teaching, he replied: 'Well, I think not all the time. It depends on the nature of the lesson itself' (AL3 41:28).

Alwaleed's position here reflects little intention for planning for CA on a regular basis. Although considering CA opportunities during teaching is central in CA planning, his comments imply less regularity of considering CA in planning for teaching. I asked him whether he thinks during the planning stage about making links between his teaching objectives and CA:

A. Yes, I think, sometimes I do this, but you see, we have big numbers in classes, so sometimes it depends on the task itself. May be some tasks are very demanding for most of the students or for some of them, so the assessment depends on the atmosphere of the lesson itself and also the position of the lesson: maybe lesson one is different from lesson four and you know lesson eight on Wednesday is very difficult. So, sometimes students feel tired, lazy and don't want to participate. I can notice that with some students. (AL1 23:33)

Once again, repeating the phrase "I think, sometimes I do this", seems to suggest that Alwaleed was not confident in his position regarding considering CA in planning and thus he tried here to rationalise his behaviour to some factors which he sees as being beyond his control: "but you see, we have big numbers in classes". Also, his responses here about planning for CA are very vague and, on closer inspection, are not really sound.

I asked him further questions about his planning for teaching, whether he usually considers any specific learners to assess or to follow-up their progress as a part of CA:

A. Yes, of course, sure. This happens sometimes because when I concentrate on certain students in my class, most of time I watch their progress from time to time. Before I go to the lesson I ask myself questions: what is this boy is going to do? Will he change his learning

efforts? Will he be better than before? I sometimes ask myself these questions and waiting for the answers from the class.

O. and do you put them (questions) down in your lesson notes?

A. Actually no, but I memorize them (questions) and I remember every one of my students. (AL3 39.38)

Alwaleed response 'Yes, of course, sure' perhaps was due to my questioning strategy ('Do you ...?'), which more likely to produce 'yes' answers, especially if the teacher felt I was asking about things he thinks he should be doing. Also, we have seen earlier his attitude towards CA planning (see AL1 23:33 above) and also his words here 'this happens sometimes' indicate a level of hesitation in his comments about what he was actually suggesting. Also, his comments about depending on memory for CA of learners may suggest that his explanation was probably an attempt of avoiding being direct of not considering the official requirement of planning for CA.

Alwaleed's little attention to considering CA in planning for teaching and his attitude towards it appear to contradict his beliefs about CA summarised in 8.2. I will now discuss how far his planning appears to be consistent with his practice.

#### **8.4 Keeping records of CA**

During my observation of Alwaleed's class I did not notice any record keeping. Also, Alwaleed was unable to provide me with any form of records usually used by teachers during the process of CA and , as we saw earlier in 8.3, keeping records of CA was not evident in Alwaleed's comments regarding planning for CA. Based on those incidents I asked him about his way for gathering information for the purpose of CA:

O. OK, if you are using CA, how do you then collect information about students' performance, achievements of the language outcomes?

A. Well, I collect information from the daily teaching, I see the progress for example, if I have students who failed from semester one for example; well, I watch them day by day and by moving around students, looking at their work, what they are doing, even the speed of writing or copying, I watch everything, so through this watching I may sometimes write notes or put down some notes. (AL3 37:13)

Alwaleed explained that he collects information through daily observation of learners' everyday work by noticing everything done by them; however, this position here regarding observation seems to contradict his view about the difficulty of considering CA during teaching due to some internal contextual factors such as the large class size (see

AL1 23:33). Also, Alwaleed was not clear, in the above quote, how regular he keeps record of the information gathered and whether he only collects information about slow learners (e.g. "if I have students who failed from semester one for example"), I further explored this issue:

O. What do you mean by "I may sometimes write notes"? Does that mean keeping notes on a regular basis about every student in your class?

A. Well, no, no, not all the students only the weakest ones, the weak students. (AL3 35:56)

Alwaleed stated here that he only keeps notes about slow learners. However, assessing and keeping notes only about slow learners does not reflect the nature of CA in which all learners in the class should be assessed on a regular basis. Therefore, his words about doing it for slow learners were probably due to the pressure of the interview. In this case, once again, as we saw earlier in 8.3, Alwaleed comments above may reflect a lack of awareness of this CA procedure of keeping notes and is perhaps due to him not paying attention to the implementation of CA. The next quote provides further evidence of this:

O. Don't you have a record for CA of every student in your class?

A. No, just the mark register only.

O. So don't you have what it is called a notebook in which you put down information about students' progress during your CA of them?

A. No, but as I said from the daily watching from my dealing with them every day, I watch their progress, I watch their weakness...(AL3 35:43)

Alwaleed's comments imply less attention for considering CA during teaching and thus the rationale he gave of his ability to remember the CA information was again to justify his behaviour: "No, but as I said...".

I clarified further as follows:

O. How can you remember the information if you don't have a record of every student? When you come to give them marks, how can you remember them?

A. Well, I usually put the marks at the end of the semester just to give the students opportunities, chance to develop themselves, to do well, to do better so I can remember. I can write down some notes, but not in a special record, maybe in the mark register itself or in a sheet of paper with their name; sometimes I write some notes but not for all the students for the weakest ones: writing for example ticks or crosses, double crosses or double ticks, for example, double ticks means the



students did something good twice and as well for the double crosses or three Xs. For example, these Xs means three times not doing homework or misbehaviour or something like this. I think because of my experience in teaching, now this is 22nd year, so I think I don't need to write everything (laugh) just remember the students by daily dealing with them (laugh). (AL3 34:59)

Three issues emerge here. Firstly, once again as also revealed above (AL3 35:43), it appears from his comments "I think because of my experience in teaching, now this is 22nd year, so I think I don't need to write everything" (and laugh) that Alwaleed is quite dismissive of the CA procedure. The influence of his long experience in his position here seems to be important. His behaviour here perhaps influenced, as his words suggest, by a belief that he reached a stage in his experience where he can depend on his own judgment rather than following the officially sanctioned way of assessment.

Secondly, his words such as "I can write down some notes" and "maybe in the mark register" imply less certainty of his actual use of the procedure of only keeping record of slow learners' CA, as we have seen above in (AL3 35:56). This practice was also not evident in the observation, as Alwaleed was unable to show any such records to me, when I asked him about them.

The third issue here is his comments about putting the marks at the end of the semester rather than using CA records to keep track of how learners' marks develop during the semester. His justification for doing so was to give his learners opportunities to develop themselves and gain better achievements until the time for awarding marks comes. This shows his lack of commitment to CA and how aware he was of his negligence of it. Although Alwaleed had a belief that assessment should take place continuously throughout the year (see 8.2), this belief may contradict a super-ordinate belief that he holds in which what probably really matters to him is whether the learners get a good grade.

I explored the issue of assessing at the end of the learning process:

O. OK, so when you come to put down the marks you said you put them by the end of the semester?

A. Yes.

O. So, don't you do anything else before that?

A. No, and I tell the students because I'm waiting for the progress, for them to do better, giving them chance to do better, to be better than

before for example; and usually I tell them that I'm going to put the marks at the end of semester just before the final exams to give them chance, you see, because if I put them in the middle of the semester maybe they become frustrated, because they think everything has been done and no need to do anything.

O. So what about the idea of the ongoing process of CA, I mean writing notes and putting initial marks and then change them after sometime according to their progress?

A. I do it at the end, most of the time at the end, I know some teachers write them (marks) in pencils and then change them later on but I like waiting students to do better and not to judge them immediately. (AL3 32:55)

Alwaleed confirmed here his practice of assessing at the end of the process and also his minimal preference to use CA. Although he seemed aware of the procedure of putting the initial marks in pencils and then changing them later on, he was confident of his own procedure of assessing at the end, as we saw earlier (AL3 34:59). Thus, perhaps Alwaleed does understand CA, but it contradicts a stronger belief that he holds, as we also saw earlier in (AL3 34:59), of prioritizing assessment procedures that allow him to focus on what makes his learners get good grades at the end of the semester. His unwillingness to do CA seems to stem from his resistance to change which also could have influenced his position to assess at the end. Also, his practice of assessing at the end matches his beliefs reported in the questionnaire of assessing at the end of the learning process and focusing on learners' final achievements (see 8.2). Thus, his strong beliefs about traditional assessment might have influenced his actual behaviour here more than his strong beliefs about CA.

I discussed with him the feasibility of his practice of making notes only about the weakest learners rather than doing it for the whole class:

O. Ok, you said you don't make notes about other students you only do it for the weakest students?

A. Yes, weak students, most of the time.

O. Then how do you know about other students, how do you know about their assessment, will you be able if you have for example, say 25 students in the class, will you be able to remember all the students if you don't have notes or written information about them?

A. Yes indeed because I teach them daily so I remember everyone also I have their short tests marks; they give some information sometimes and also I know from their daily efforts, daily participation during the lesson. (AL3 31:14)

Alwaleed's reply shows, once again, his resistance as an experienced teacher. Although I tried to explain to him that his procedure is not practical with a large number of learners, his words "yes indeed" indicate how confident he was on his own judgments and dismissive to the official procedure, as we also saw in (AL3 34:59).

## **8.5 CA of the language skills**

I clarified from Alwaleed about the procedure he follows in arriving at CA marks of his learners' writing:

A. Well, this year I teach fifth and sixth so I think they are very close to each other, so most of the writing, for example, is short texts maybe short sentences or simple sentences so I think this is easy to be noticed and it's very noticeable because when I go around the students and as I know every one of them I can watch them during the lesson. For example some students, good students or brilliant students finish before the others and the weak students will find difficulty in language structure and how to build up the sentences, even some of them don't know what to do and cannot understand the idea of the writing, what the writing question is asking them to do.

O. Does that mean you arrive to their CA marks through your observation of their writing during the lesson?

A. Yes, observation, the daily observation. (AL3 29:41)

Once again, Alwaleed said that he relies on his memory to award the CA marks for writing. His explanation here of assessing writing inside the class contradict the tenets of CA of writing: CA of writing requires assessing multiple drafts of learners' writing all through the semester, looking at them closely and giving the learners feedback so to arrive at their CA marks. Moreover, his comments such as "I think this is easy to be noticed" and "I can watch them during the lesson", seem to reflect lack of awareness of the feasibility of what he was actually suggesting and he seemed to be making real-time decisions in response to my question.

With regard to CA of speaking, I clarified as follows:

O. You mentioned their classroom participation; do you mean you assess their speaking through your observation of their classroom participation?

A. Yes, I assess or I check I watch all the language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing during the lesson. (AL3 24:14)

Alwaleed indicated here that not only speaking he assesses through observation but all the language skills. We have seen earlier that his procedure to assess only by observation without keeping record of the information gathered does not reflect the nature of CA (see 8.4). Also, some language skills such as reading and writing would be impossible to assess simply by observation (as illustrated above about writing). For example to assess reading, the learners are required to do some independent reading outside the class with some related tasks which the teacher is required to check on a regular basis. Thus, once again as revealed above in this section and in 8.4, Alwaleed's comments regarding assessing all the language skills merely through observations indicate his lack of attention to implement CA with his learners and thus his reply was again probably due to the pressure of interview.

I asked Alwaleed whether he uses other CA tools to assess speaking:

O. There are two ways to assess speaking: one of them is one way which is presentation, do you often ask them to do presentations for the purpose of CA?

A. Yes, I do this but for good students, for example if I teach about the simple present, next day I ask one or two students to come out, give them markers and ask them to explain what we did yesterday and this is for the purpose of CA but only for good students.

O. What about the other students? I mean how do you assess them in one way speaking, in presentations?

A. But I think the mark register or the mark sheet, I think it has been changed this year just 5 marks for speaking. It's not specified in the mark sheet, I'm not sure about that I think only speaking reading writing.

O. So you are not sure whether presentation is included as one aspect to be used to assess speaking?

A. No. (AL3 23:27)

Alwaleed initially explained that he uses presentations only to assess the good learners' speaking. However, when I asked him about other learners in the class, he appeared less confident that assessing by presentations is still a CA tool. This contradiction in his comments casts doubt on the extent of his actual use of presentations for the purpose of CA. Moreover, Alwaleed's lack of confidence about the changes in the assessment of speaking, as his comments suggest, seems to indicate lack of information about this aspect, which could be regarded as a lack of interest in knowing about CA.

## 8.6 Self-assessment

As suggested in SAH, teachers are advised to make use of what is revealed by learners' self-assessments and combine it together with other outcomes of CA to have diagnostic information about learners. I asked Alwaleed about this as follows:

O. Do you get your students to assess themselves and do you make use of this self-assessment for the purpose of CA?

A. Ah for the purpose of CA, I do this, I do it (self-assessment) from time to time, but not for CA. For example, when I give them the spelling test I ask them to mark the spelling test and I see most of the students are honest in this strategy; I go through the class and check and see different marks, 4 out of 6, 2 out of 6, even those students who get one mark out of six they write one and put one tick because they have only one correct word. On the other hand, I use self-assessment in writing for example, I ask students to write some sentences about certain situations and then I ask them to read what they wrote and I give feedback for them after reading those short texts. For example, I say Ali you are good but you have some grammatical mistakes, the other one you are good but you didn't cover the question here. (AL3 12:05)

Alwaleed was frank here that he did not use self-assessment for the purpose of CA. His words " Ah for the purpose of CA, I do this, I do it from time to time, but not for CA" imply that he was not aware of the use of self-assessment as a part of CA. This lack of awareness indicates again a lack of interest in knowing about CA and also in using it to assess his learners.

Alwaleed reported a belief that self-assessment is a good way to increase learners' awareness of assessing themselves in many aspects of language learning (see 8.2). This belief regarding self-assessment, then, might be for the value of self-assessment as a teaching technique rather than as a CA tool. The procedure, he explained above (AL3 12:05), of involving learners in marking their own work might stem, then, from the above belief.

## 8.7 Learners' portfolios

As we saw above, Alwaleed clearly stated that he did not make use of the self-assessment's outcomes for the purpose of CA. I asked him about other tools as follows:

O. What about other tools like portfolios, do you make use of their portfolios?

A. Well, yes, they have portfolios and I give them activities from time to time but you see I think it's very difficult to use their portfolios all

the time for example in these days I use the portfolio only once a week on Wednesdays.

O. What do you use it for?

A. To check their work and to give them some more activities and also for spelling test because every two or three weeks I give them spelling test and I put it at the end of the week.

O. and do you check those portfolios on a regular basis I mean for the purpose of CA?

A. For the purpose of CA? Well, I'm not sure about this because I ask them to do the activities together.

O. Do you check the portfolios on a regular basis so you make notes about the work they have in their portfolios and later on according to the information you gathered about their portfolios you award marks, do you do that?

A. No, indeed I don't check portfolios; I depend on the skills book and class book and from the participation because the portfolios you see the big number of students inside the class, I have more than 30 students in each class and it's difficult to check every one portfolio. I use it just for putting the activities like spelling test inside it but for other purposes I am not sure because myself I don't know how to use and also it's very difficult for me because every student has two books, one exercise book, and a portfolio: too much work. (AL3 28:00)

While Alwaleed generally did not admit his lack of understanding of CA mentioned previously, he was frank here that he does not understand how to use portfolios for CA purposes. Alwaleed rationalised his behaviour of not using portfolios with reference to factors which he sees as being beyond his control. However, this indicates a conflict in his comments: while he stated earlier he does not check portfolios and he was not sure about them, his rationale was about the difficulty of applying portfolios for CA of learners. Thus, his rationale of his behaviour was perhaps real-time justification rather than experiencing difficulties in using portfolios. Accordingly, lack of awareness of using portfolios for CA ('For the purpose of CA? Well I'm not sure about this') seemed to stem largely from his lack of attention to use CA, as we have seen in the previous sections.

## **8.8 Task-based assessment**

A suggested CA procedure for teachers is to build pair work/group work activities into each lesson and observe learners closely during these activities for the purpose of CA. I asked Alwaleed about this as follows:

O. Ok, do you know the idea of task-based learning, that you give your students some tasks to do and your job is to observe the students and collect information about them, do you use this idea of task-based learning for the purpose of CA?

A. No actually I don't.

O. Why?

A. Well, I think big number of students, more than 90 students in 3 classes with an average of 32 students in each class. I'm lucky to have 3 classes this year because most of the years 4 classes more than 100 to 130 students. So I think it's difficult to do this and on the other hand, it's difficult to follow them because if you have 30 students in one class and you want to check every one, this will take time and also we have some other work and some other things to do during the class. (AL3 5:57)

As we saw in different places of this analysis, Alwaleed, once again, attributed the lack of doing task-based assessment to the difficulty of applying this strategy in a class with 32 learners. As we saw above in his justification about using portfolio, Alwaleed kept here rationalising his behaviour to the same factor of having a big class which he sees beyond his control. The challenge of the large class size did exist in his situation (according to my observation) but that does not seem to account fully for the absence of CA as there is no evidence that he tried to use CA and therefore experienced any problems due to this. As his comments suggest, his reply here was, once again, a justification for not using the task-based assessment and thus he based it on expectation of potential difficulties. Moreover, based on the observation data, the situation in his classroom was not likely suitable for implementing such task-based assessment: there were very little opportunities for Alwaleed to observe and listen to the learners as he was mostly involved in the interaction. Also, the learners were sitting in rows and the teacher, too, did not create any opportunity for pair work or group work in the class. Thus, CA of some learning outcomes (such as two-way speaking) would be difficult to conduct as learners were not given chance to interact with each other. The learner-centred ELT curriculum was introduced over a decade ago (see 1.3) and thus, after this major reform one would expect to see some evidence of interactive work in teachers' classroom. This highlights a potential resistance to change in this teacher. Therefore, if his teaching had not changed in line with the principles of the curriculum, it is highly unlikely that his assessment practices would have.

Although Alwaleed said he believed that using different assessment techniques assist the teacher in judging individual learners' performances (see 8.2), the discussion in the

previous sections revealed that due to his attitude towards CA implementation his belief does not appear to be consistent with his practice.

## **8.9 Factors influencing Alwaleed's CA practice**

We have seen in the analysis above that Alwaleed felt unsure of some CA tools such as using portfolios and assessing by presentations. I tried to clarify this. First, I asked him if he had a copy of the assessment handbook:

O. You know there is one assessment document (assessment handbook) provided by the Ministry of education; do you have a copy of that document?

A. Well, yes, I have I have but I think there is another one, they keep changing it. (AL3 23:14)

Alwaleed's comments here indicate he is not confident about having a copy of the assessment handbook. I asked Alwaleed further questions about the assessment handbook as follows:

O. Do you think the information provided by that document is useful and clear for you and do you benefit from that document regarding CA?

A. Yes, the information is useful and clear but the problem is how to apply these aspects with our students. According to certain circumstances, for example, our society, the situation, students life, their situations and their life cases outside the school, I think in some cases we are not able to apply these aspects; For example, in writing in Grade 5..., let's leave Grade 5 and talk in general; for example, we have different types of writing, different types of reading, different types of speaking: one way or two way speaking. So, I think it's difficult to assess individual students in, for example, one way speaking and two way speaking because we don't have time to do this and also we have big numbers in the classes. So if I pick up individual students and assess them every day or every week in one way speaking or two way speaking, in writing narrative, in writing instructions, this will take long time and I think this is very difficult. So in general I assess students in their participations, in their responses to my teaching and in their responses to the situations inside the classroom and most of time I don't follow these aspects. (AL2 22:49)

Once again, Alwaleed provided here similar justification, as we saw in the previous sections, for the absence of CA in his work related to the impracticality of implementing CA tools in his classroom. However, Alwaleed showed here an awareness of some aspects of CA and he also had a large awareness of some expected challenges that may hinder the implementation process; and after mentioning those challenges he clearly stated that he did not follow the CA guidelines. Thus, once again, Alwaleed's resistance



to implement CA could be attributed to the influence of his confidence on his long experience and his adherence to his own procedure, as we have seen in 8.4. His awareness of the potential challenges of implementing the CA guidelines seems to indicate that he feels more secure to use his own judgments (as a result of his experience) rather than taking the risk of implementing the new procedure.

At the time of study, Alwaleed was teaching only three periods out of eight periods a day which means he was having sufficient time to do extra work outside the classroom. I asked him about keeping records and taking notes of CA after the lesson:

O. If you don't have time during the lesson itself, don't you have time to make notes or to check your students work during your free time after the lesson?

A. Well, when I mark their books, class book, and skills book I can get an idea about everyone, every single student from their handwriting and form their work. (AL3 3:30)

Once again his reply here shows how confident Alwaleed was of himself as an experienced teacher. He probably meant here to show his position and his ability to gather information about the learners from other sources and avoid, at the same time, expressing his unwillingness of making notes during the free periods: 'I can get an idea about everyone, every single student'. I followed-up his last point as follows:

O. and do you keep a record of that information?

A. No, no but still I remember those students from watching them from checking their books during the lesson not all of them you see five or six student in every lesson because of the large number. (AL3 2:55)

Alwaleed's comments here also indicate his tendency of providing justification for the absence of CA in his work.

I asked Alwaleed about his source of information when he is not clear about aspects of CA. He replied:

A. Well about the assessment, you see, because of the external factors I think we face difficulties in teaching, these difficulties are obstacles for us so if you want to apply educational theories or if you want to change activities if you want to add something new, sometimes you are not able to do this because of the external factors: the students themselves. These obstacles stop us from going on.

O. Do you mean from doing CA?

A. Yes.

O. Would you please give me an example?

A. For example, most of our students don't read at home, don't do anything and their efforts at home is very limited so if you give some additional activities in reading or in writing they don't do it. A very good example I have troubles with about 20 students who refuse to do their homework for three days, I sent them to the administration twice or three times just to push them to do this homework. It was very easy homework. So because of this amount of knowledge and this attitude towards learning we face problems and these problems stop us. (AL3 20:53)

As explained earlier in 8.5, learners are required, as a part of CA, to undertake some activities outside the classroom, such as independent reading and multiple drafts of writing. Alwaleed's comments above illustrate his feeling about his learners' weakness in English and their attitude towards learning. Alwaleed justified here the absence of CA in his work to the learners' reluctance to do the assigned activities at home. This factor and others he mentioned above, as we have seen in the previous sections, could have an influence on Alwaleed's lack of implementing CA but, as I also explained earlier, they do not seem to account entirely for the absence of CA. Alwaleed, as we saw in the discussion above, mainly seemed unwilling to implement CA and there is also some evidence of a lack of interest in knowing about it (as illustrated in 8.5).

When I asked Alwaleed if he had received sufficient training about CA, he replied that he had his CA training as a part of the Cycle 2 Course. I asked him further questions about that training as follows:

O. Do you think that training was sufficient for you? Did you get something that you can take it and use it with your students?

A. Well, that course lasted for one semester and most of work was about evaluating some tasks from Grade 7; so the tutor brought us photocopied materials from Grade 7, I think most of the time from Grade 7, Grade 5, and Grade 4. We spent time analysing these activities and talking about them, so I don't think so; it was four years ago, so I think it wasn't at the level which I were looking for. (AL2 13:32)

Although Alwaleed comments here indicate that the course did not provide sufficient focus on assessment and did not meet his expectation, in the analysis above he never rationalised his behaviour of not implementing CA to the lack of training; yet, Alwaleed had his first CA training four years ago which could have an influence on his current behaviour and attitude towards the official CA guidelines. That is, while teachers examine and assess the introduced innovation, they need to be supported in a way that

their personal practical understandings and beliefs of the innovation are equipped to deal with the implementation of a new approach. Alwaleed, in this case, could have preferred to stay with the security of the traditional approach of assessment (as we saw in AL2 22:49), perhaps due to the lack of the necessary rationale, skills, knowledge, and attitudes for successful implementation of the CA innovation.

I asked Alwaleed whether he gets support from supervisors and the senior teacher in the school regarding CA:

A. Ok, well, I don't think so because most of time senior teacher and inspectors just keep on specific points. They always discuss the same points; for example, involve as many students as you can, help weak students, mark the books, look for the weak students; so the same ideas, the same points, and unfortunately nothing new.

O. and do they usually talk about CA?

A. No,

O. Do they give you some comments, some feedback about using CA?

A. About assessment itself, I don't think so, just general points and some notes about what they have seen during the lesson only. (AL2 11:16)

Alwaleed felt that the supervisors and the senior teacher focus on general points all the time without paying much attention to providing support for CA. Although lack of support from supervisors and the senior teacher could be another factor that probably influenced Alwaleed's attitude towards CA, he did not seem very concerned, as his comments suggest, about the lack of such support. Alwaleed's comments here about supervisors and the senior teacher little attention to providing support for assessment might indicate that both supervisors and teachers may be sharing similar feelings of ignoring the Ministry guidelines probably due to their attitude towards the implementation process and/or due to what they see as more important aspects of their job.

## **8.10 Summary**

The analysis showed there was a large gap between Alwaleed's beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaire and expressed in the follow-up interview and his actual practices. This account appears to provide evidence of Alwaleed's resistance to change. Alwaleed was mainly reluctant to implement CA and there was also evidence of a lack of interest in

knowing about it. This behaviour seemed to be influenced by a belief that he reached a stage in his experience where he can depend on his own judgment rather than following the officially sanctioned way of assessment. There was evidence in the data of conflict between his practice of assessing at the end of the learning process and his verbalisations of the thinking behind the absence of CA in his work. He repeatedly rationalized his behaviour with references to factors that he saw as being beyond his control. Although Alwaleed's reluctance to implement CA was mainly due to the long experience factor, other contextual factors emerged in the analysis might have contributed to that attitude towards CA implementation, such as the challenges of the large class size, the lack of training and the difficulty of using some CA procedures in practice.

## **CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The overall aim of this study was to investigate the beliefs and practices of teachers of English with regard to the CA reform in the assessment system in Oman. Chapter 4 presented information the teachers reported in the questionnaires regarding their beliefs about CA, their CA practices and the factors they said affected their implementation of CA. Chapters 5-8 illustrated how four teachers of English in Oman dealt with and made sense of CA they were required to use to assess their learners' English language skills. Those chapters presented the findings of the study in relation to the following research questions:

- What are English teachers' beliefs about CA?
- To what extent and how do four English teachers in a Cycle 2 school implement CA in their classrooms?
- To what extent are teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about CA?
- What according to English teachers are the factors that influence their CA practices?

Generally speaking, the findings showed a big gap between the beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaires and the teachers' actual CA practices and the beliefs underlying these practices. In Chapter 2, I presented the limitations in previous studies investigating the beliefs and practices of teachers with regard to assessment reforms worldwide. The scope of the research on CA has been limited to small-scale research, only exploring teachers' stated beliefs without looking at their actual practices in real classrooms or only evaluating the implementation process without considering teachers' beliefs and other contextual factors in hindering or facilitating the implementation of assessment reform. However, the design of this study aimed to provide an investigation of beliefs grounded in specific classroom assessment practices: starting with eliciting teachers' beliefs in the questionnaires, clarifying those beliefs in the follow-up interviews, following them up through the observations of specific classroom assessment practices and then working towards the cognitive bases of these practices through post-observation interviews. This helped identify the apparent gaps between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual

practice and the complex range of factors, which interactively shaped the relationship between beliefs and practices under CA reform.

My aim in this chapter is to develop a general understanding of teachers' assessment practices and their relationship with their beliefs under the CA reform which is grounded in an analysis of the work of practicing teachers of English in real classrooms. This Chapter extends our current understandings of the implementation of CA and provides the basis for continuing research on the beliefs of language teachers on CA as well as the challenges that influence their assessment practices. It discusses the major issues suggested by the key findings of the above research questions (as shown in Chapters 4-8) with the aim of relating them to the literature. To help guide the discussion, this chapter first provides brief summaries of the results that related to the four research questions of this study; this is followed by an interpretation of the results focusing on the main themes that emerged from the study, with reference to the literature (reviewed in Chapter 2).

## **9.2 Research Question 1: what are English teachers' beliefs about CA?**

The majority of the English teachers who participated in the quantitative part of this study reported strong positive attitudes towards CA. Generally speaking, they agreed strongly with statements in the questionnaires referring to CA-type practices (mean=4.2) more than the statements about the traditional assessment practices (mean=3.4) (though there was neither any direct reference to CA in the statements nor to traditional assessment) (see 3.10.2 & 4.4). When the six teachers who participated in the qualitative part of the study were asked in the follow-up interviews about their strong positive responses about CA, they confirmed their strong preference for CA and explained this with reference to the following benefits (mentioned with the similar frequency): regularity of CA through the academic year; immediacy of the information received through CA; ability of CA to motivate learners to work hard; and ability of CA to provide opportunities for learners to compensate for earlier weaknesses. The six teachers also stated that CA maintains a strong link with the learning process and helps in identifying the learning difficulties of the learners. One frequent comment repeated by most teachers is that CA is more effective in assessing learners than assessing them only at the end of the learning process. Also, all of them felt that CA provides opportunities to

involve learners in the process of assessment and this is important to increase learners' awareness of their weaknesses.

### **9.3 Research Question 2: to what extent and how do four English teachers in a cycle two school implement CA in their classrooms?**

As I explained in 3.10.2, the selection of the four observed teachers was based on their scores in section two of the questionnaire which elicited teachers' beliefs about CA. I selected two teachers with high scores on CA and two teachers from the second group who were in favour of both traditional assessment and CA (see more details in 3.10.2).

The four teachers of English who were studied here generally did not seem open to opportunities for CA in their plans for teaching as recommended by the CA guidelines. There was no indication in their lesson plans or in their comments about their plans for teaching of willingness for exploiting opportunities in the classroom for the purpose of CA.

One of the main themes emerging from the data is that the teachers had general awareness of the recommended procedure in which it suggests that CA tools should be used for gathering information on a regular basis about their learners. However, generally speaking, the teachers did not use the recommended techniques. For example, none of them systematically observed their learners for the purpose of CA. The study showed little evidence in their comments in the interviews or from the observation data that they were intentionally trying to gather information for the purpose of CA. The data indicated a lack of commitment among the teachers to keep records of assessment during teaching and during their observation of their learners. Also, all of them stated in the interviews that they depend on their memory to keep the information gathered about their learners. In addition, as it appeared clearly in the cases of Muhanad and Alzahra'a, the teachers only relied on one or two pieces of work for filling in the icons in the CA summary sheet at the end of semester rather than on monitoring their learners' work over the semester to arrive at their cumulative achievement. The teachers' decisions to make changes in their lessons or to adapt their teaching techniques seemed to be based on information gathered during normal teaching without paying attention to the official procedure of making records as suggested by the CA guidelines.

Generally speaking, the teachers used some of the suggested official tools such as the learners' journals, portfolios, projects and presentations. However, it was unclear how these tools contributed to the CA of the learners or fed into the final record of CA. There was little evidence in the teachers' comments in the interviews, in the observation data or in their assessment documents that the teachers were assessing learners on a regular basis and using them regularly for CA purposes as recommended by the CA guidelines. As the data revealed, there was a common practice by all teachers to use such assessment tools due to their official importance. That is, despite the teachers' low level of commitment to CA, they still employed some of its procedures superficially, possibly because they believed their performance would be judged on the basis of whether they included these practices. For example, Badar adhered more rigidly to using portfolios (see 6.3.6) because he thought that they are the only thing the supervisors want to check. Another example was Muhanad's emphasis on presentations, which, as the data indicated, can be ascribed to the pressure exerted by the Moderation Committee to check teachers' use of CA (see 5.5.3).

In summary, the version of CA that was found to be taking place in the classrooms was, in effect, sequential summative assessment. That is, teachers conducted a series of mini-summative assessments (e.g. portfolios, projects, presentations) at several points during the school year, from which the teachers arrive at a total of CA marks that they report in the final CA summary sheet.

#### **9.4 Research Question 3: to what extent are teachers' actual practices congruent with their stated beliefs about CA?**

As we have seen in the answers to the first and second research questions, the study showed there was a large gap between the beliefs about CA reported in the questionnaires and expressed in the follow-up interviews and the teachers' actual CA practices. However, I have to acknowledge that only a small percentage of the survey sample were interviewed and observed. Although in the questionnaire they generally expressed strong positive beliefs about the value of CA as an assessment approach and confirmed these feelings in the follow-up interviews, they mostly showed lack of commitment to implementing CA in actual practice. Their assessment behaviours during actual practice reflected general resistance towards implementing the CA procedures recommended by the CA guidelines.



### **9.5 Research Question 4: what according to English teachers are the factors that influence their CA practices?**

In the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to provide up to five challenges that influenced their implementation of CA. The most frequently reported challenges by the teachers varied between time-consuming CA practices, curriculum workload, large number of learners in the classroom and difficulties in dealing with CA procedures. Other challenges such as the interference of school principals in the assessment of learners and bias of the Moderation Committee were the least mentioned ones (see Table 24).

With regard to the item in the questionnaires of whether the teachers attended training about CA, the majority of teachers reported that they did not receive it (see Table 25). The teachers who reported that they had attended training stated that it was a part of the Cycle 2 course or Cycle 1 course. Short sessions, cascaded training by senior teachers, and pre-service training were the least mentioned types of CA training. Regarding the content of the CA training, the majority of teachers reported that the focus of the training was on enhancing the practical use of CA.

According to the results from the four case studies, the teachers, generally speaking, rationalised their behaviours for not using some CA procedures in terms of external forces they had no control over such as: large class sizes, inadequate time for using many different procedures of CA, learners' reluctance to do the assigned activities at home, the lack of training and following the supervisors' preference for keeping portfolios as the only assessment procedure. However, the factors mentioned by the teachers could partly explain their low level of implementation of CA but they do not seem to account entirely for the absence of CA in their work as I discuss later on in this chapter.

Having summarized the main finding from the quantitative and qualitative data regarding teachers' beliefs, their actual practices and the factors influencing their practices, I will now relate these findings emerging from the study to the literature.

### **9.6 The gap between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices**

As stated above, one key issue to emerge from this study is the limited consistency between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices. This finding lends support to recent research in language education as Basturkmen (2012) found in her research

review limited correspondence between teachers' stated beliefs and their practices. The finding also supports the claim of the importance of contextual factors and constraints in influencing teachers' actual practices (Fang, 1996; Borg, 2003; Lee, 2009). However, the study found that changes in the behaviour of teachers in real practice were not only due to the mediation of external contextual factors but there were also teachers' beliefs which played a major factor in driving their behaviour inside the classroom.

This divergence between stated beliefs and actual practices found in this study can be attributed to a number of factors evident in the data and that the complex interplay between these factors influences the extent of implementation of CA in real practice.

In the following sections, I discuss these factors emerging from the study that probably led to this mismatch between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practice.

### **9.6.1 Hierarchy of beliefs**

One factor emerging from this study that possibly led to the gap between the stated beliefs and actual practices could be related to the tension between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs (Pajares, 1992). The beliefs reported by the teachers in the questionnaires and in the follow-up interviews (see 9.2) seemed to reflect peripheral beliefs among teachers about CA in theory. As Phipps and Borg (2009, p. 382) claim "beliefs elicited through questionnaires may reflect teachers' theoretical or idealistic beliefs – beliefs about what should be –". Whereas the beliefs that guide teachers' behaviour inside the classroom seemed to be core, as "Core beliefs are stable and exert a more powerful influence on behaviour than peripheral beliefs" (Phipps and Borg, 2009, p. 381). That is, despite the teachers' conscious agreement that assessing learners on a regular basis was a more educationally sound approach, they were unlikely to follow it because it possibly clashed with these other more strongly held values and beliefs. In this study, for example, most teachers felt that assessment should be based on a variety of assessment techniques and conducted on an ongoing basis, but were reluctant to follow their subordinate beliefs probably because of their core beliefs about the difficulty of applying CA in practice. For example, Alzahra did believe that assessing by independent reading tasks (learners select their own reading according to their level, do some independent reading tasks to respond personally to texts that they have read, and then submit them to the teacher as evidence of their independent reading) was in theory valuable, but her previous experience with her learners had perhaps led her to believe that assessing them in the class under her control was more beneficial for them. In her

comments, she prioritized helping her learners and saw that as her pre-eminent task and assessment was a secondary consideration. Another example, Alwaleed expressed a belief in his questionnaire response that assessment should take place continuously throughout the year (see 8.2), but this appears to contradict a possible stronger belief of prioritizing assessment procedures that allow him to focus on what makes his learners get good grades at the end of the semester. Similarly, Muhanad also had a theoretical belief about the value of monitoring learners' work over semester to arrive at their cumulative achievement. However, his experience of dealing with his learners had probably led him to use some summative assessment approaches suitable to the situation in his classroom. For example, he did not adopt the CA recommended procedure of getting the learners to do several drafts of writing during the semester independently because some learners tended to copy or ask someone else to do the writing for them. He instead asked the learners to do their writing in the class under his invigilation and without giving them any notice. He rationalized his behaviour to his general belief to prioritise helping his learners to produce their own writing and to prepare them for the writing in the final exam. It would appear then that when a conflict between beliefs arise, the stronger, more deeply held belief is likely to drive teachers' behaviour.

The finding that the gap between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices may be due to the tension between core beliefs and peripheral beliefs is broadly in line with the findings in the literature. As I discussed in Chapter 2, some studies in ELT (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Niu and Andrews, 2012; Phipps and Borg, 2009; Mohamed, 2006) have identified similar reasons to those emerging here related to the mismatch between teachers' beliefs due to a hierarchy of beliefs, in that some beliefs are core and others are secondary and as the core beliefs affect all others, teachers' secondary beliefs were seen to take a backseat. Phipps and Borg (2009, p. 387) for example, attributed the discrepancy between the teachers' stated beliefs about language learning and their practices to more "deeper, more general beliefs about learning" held by the teachers. Although the teachers in their study had beliefs about the limited value of some traditional grammar approaches, they adopted those approaches as they reflected their beliefs that learning is enhanced when those practices are used. Phipps and Borg (2009, p. 387) found that these beliefs derived from well-established experience of the suitability of those approaches in practice; whereas the beliefs which have not been firmly established in experience remain unimplemented ideals.

The finding of the current study is consistent with those in Phipps and Borg (2009, p. 387) in which they claimed that core beliefs are “experientially ingrained” and thus they are more reflected in practice whereas peripheral beliefs are only “theoretically embraced” and therefore they exert less power on behaviour. However, Phipps and Borg’s study (and also the studies mentioned earlier in this section) explored the relationship between teachers’ stated beliefs and their practices mainly in language teaching and learning; whereas the finding of this study emerged from an investigation of teachers’ beliefs about and practices of CA. Thus, I can argue here that these characteristics of beliefs and their influences on teachers’ behaviours highlighted by those studies do exist also under the CA reform in the Omani context.

### **9.6.2 Influence of teachers' disposition/attitude towards CA**

Another possible explanation for the gap between stated beliefs and actual practices is the teachers' tendency to do what is easy and more familiar to them rather than adopt the required CA procedures. As Fullan (2013) notes, such inconsistencies are not unexpected due to the demands and complexities of reforms which often pressure teachers’ desire to provide instruction that aligns perfectly with the recommended practices of the reforms. Kiely (2012), drawing on the work of social psychologist Ajzen (1988) who examined the gaps between attitudes and behaviours of teachers in particular, points out that teachers' lack of commitment to implement new practices of reforms may be due to the fact that they can only do what is possible for them, and to many factors which shape actual classroom practice and the nature of the reform itself. Also, Ajzen (1991) indicates that person's motivation to perform a behaviour is determined in terms of his/her evaluation of that behaviour as well as the cooperation of other influencing factors.

This study showed examples in which teachers showed low level of commitment towards implementing CA due to their expectation of difficulty in using it in reality. The data also showed different examples in which teachers ignored the Ministry guidelines in order to get on with what they see as the more important aspects of their jobs. Badar, for example, opted for one of the less demanding practices of CA - portfolio - as the only assessment procedure and ignored demanding techniques such as observing individual learners and making notes of their progress, though he had a small class of only seven learners and 15 lessons a week. Moreover, the analysis indicated that some of the teachers’ reference to external contextual factors to justify their lack of using some of the recommended practices was, in some cases, to avoid losing face during the interviews. Such reactions

from the teachers of this study are not unexpected as, for example, the formative assessment procedures required by Ministry guidelines, with focus on the individual learner and regular follow-up of his/her progress, demand more time and energy input on the teachers' part. This as a result may affect their readiness to adopt such techniques in real classroom. In addition, contextual constraints like big class sizes, learners' poor English levels and the tight schedule could also influence teachers' attitude to carry out such required procedures.

Another possible factor that could have contributed to this attitude among teachers of this study towards CA is the fact that they were required to use an assessment system which demanded them to assess by two methods of assessment: CA and testing. The teachers were required to use CA (40%), class tests (20%) and end of semester tests (40%) (see details in 1.4). Thus, teachers' lack of efforts to implement CA found in this study could be due to the large emphasis on tests and exams over CA. As teachers already had experience of dealing with tests and end of semester exams, they might find them more easy and familiar rather than to adopt the procedures of CA. There is evidence from the questionnaire data that possibly supports this explanation: teachers reported that they mainly use short tests to assess by CA (short tests were the most frequently reported CA tool used by teachers, see Table 23). This implies that the teachers probably had large preference of the tools which require fewer efforts on their part more than to the ones which require them to write regular notes about learners' performance. In the assessment literature, there is evidence of such attitude of teachers. Wiliam (2000, p.15) points out that

very few teachers are able or willing to operate parallel assessment systems, one designed to serve "summative" function and one designed to serve a "formative" function.

Chen (2011), in her study of EFL teachers' reaction towards CA (in the study called 'process assessment') in two universities, found that the different weightings for CA at the two universities influenced the teachers' responses to the change. While the smaller weighting of CA in the first university did not arouse major concern for the teachers to do CA, the heavier weightings in the other university did.

As I discussed in the previous section and in the sections below, most studies which investigated teachers' beliefs and their relationship with teachers' actual practice mainly related the mismatch between stated beliefs and actual practices to the conflict that often

occur between beliefs. However, little research related the mismatch to teachers' lack of readiness to adopt the techniques of assessment reforms in practice. In their study Inbar-Lourie and Donitsa-Schmidt (2009) validated a theoretical framework suggested by Hargreaves et al. (2002, p. 69) which includes four different types of factors underlying teachers' perception towards using alternative assessment practices: technological (e.g. teachers' ability to develop the understanding and skills necessary to do the assessment techniques), cultural (e.g. the influence of social and cultural context of schools), political (e.g. authority's influence) and postmodern (e.g. authenticity, reliability and validity of alternative assessment). However, Hargreaves et al.'s (2002) study did not consider teachers' attitude towards the imposed alternative assessment as one of the influencing factors ( see Hargreaves et al., 2002 for more details).

The finding of this study reflects those of Hennessy et al. (2005) who reported that mathematics teachers showed negative attitude to use ICT in the assessment of their learners due to its difficulty in real practice. The teachers adopted instead the more familiar approaches of traditional examinations. In ELT, Al-Kindi (2009) also found that teachers' perceptions of CA were not always positive as they appeared uncertain about implementing the new assessment techniques of CA in reality. Thus, the finding from this present study and the studies above support Wall (2000), who asserts that change is not always desirable for many teachers and implementation of new practices is dependent on the nature of their attitude towards them. Nevertheless, this study produced evidence that teachers' ignorance of some recommended CA was not always due to the difficulty of the implementation and due to the force of the contextual factors but to their tendency to do what is easy and more familiar to them due to their own evaluation of the practices required by the CA reform (as I illustrated above from the case of Badar and the questionnaire data).

Another possible explanation for the teachers' low level of commitment to implement CA could be, at least partially, the unfeasibility of some CA tools required by the CA reform. This could also explain their reaction of adopting more familiar assessment approaches and ignorance of some required CA procedures. As Fullan (2013) and Wedell (2009) claim, unclear and unspecified changes among the people most directly affected can lead to the problem of superficial implementation. Moreover, the Assessment Reform Group (2008) concluded in their review of assessment projects in the UK that lack of clarity about the techniques of the assessment reform may lead to confusion among

implementers and ultimately to rejection of the techniques. This study, for example, has shown that there are some aspects of CA in the assessment handbook seem to be unfeasible and in many cases do not appear to make sense to teachers. For example, Alzahra stated that she did not usually refer to the CA handbook because it was very theoretical and lengthy. Also, the guidelines required teachers to do a variety of CA procedures, while the classroom settings and the teaching approaches the teachers tended to do in their normal teaching did not seem to match the procedures expected by CA guidelines. For example, teachers were expected to observe, listen to learners and at the same time make notes during the classroom interaction, while, as the observation data showed, the teachers tended to take control of the interaction in order to increase the level of learners' participation (see the case of Alzahra). Thus, the teachers may have found it unfeasible to interact with the learners, observe and at the same time take notes. The conflict between the required approaches and the unfeasibility to adopt them in reality perhaps led teachers to ignore such approaches or use them superficially.

The finding here reflects what the literature of educational innovation highlights regarding the influence of teachers' attitude towards the imposed innovations and its relationship with their actual practices. For example, this study supports Sikes (2013) who claims failing to preoccupy teachers' attitudes about the nature of change could result with superficial implementation of innovation. In addition, it echoes his argument in that teachers tend to do whatever they see right to do even if it is against the goals of the innovation. Such reaction by teachers towards assessment innovation does not seem to be a recent issue in educational contexts; McCallum et al. (1993) who investigated the implementation of teacher assessment in the UK nearly two decades ago found that some teachers in their study ignored the assessment during teaching as they found it unfeasible to teach and collect information about learners at the same time. However, that study only explored teachers' views through a survey and interviews. As we can see from the discussion above, the reaction of little efforts to implement CA in practice by the teachers of this study is not totally an unexpected behaviour. As Fullan (1993, p. 23) claims: "you cannot make people change; you cannot force individuals to think differently or compel them to develop new skills". Sikes (2013) also questions the ability of imposed reform to achieve its goals if its main implementers do not share positive attitudes towards it.

### **9.6.3 Influence of the cultural challenges**

A third reason found in this study that may have led to the discrepancy between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices could be the cultural challenges that the innovation poses for the existing norms and values (Holliday, 2001; Wedell, 2008; Fullan, 2013; Hyland and Wong, 2013; Wedell, 2013) of the Omani education system.

The first aspect that I discuss in this section is the teachers' beliefs about the need to adopt some assessment practices that suit the norms and values in their workplace context. That is, although the CA system expects teachers to do the required CA practices, the teachers tended to act according to the existing norms and values in the workplace context. Wedell (2013) notes that the norms and behaviours in the working context affect the behaviour and attitudes of teachers when they are confronted by change. As I discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.4.1), Holliday (1994, p.11&129) describes the influence of the workplace context as the 'deep action' of local cultures and he referred to factors at school level and also to others related to 'the wider educational institution'. He mentions a number of figures and factors that may influence what happens in the classroom such as local education officials, fellow teachers, students, parents and the effect of existing norms and behaviours in the working context.

In this study, we have seen evidence that teachers paid lip service to CA implementation and adopted some summative assessment practices due to the impact of the workplace context at school level and at the level of teachers' community. For example, the analysis indicated that Muhanad used a series of mini-summative assessments rather than tracking the learners' progress over time through CA in order to suit the situation in his school (the teachers in his school adopt those practices and his learners also expected him to adopt those practices) (see 5.5.3). Also, Badar realised that assessing merely by portfolio was a very common practice among teachers in his area and it was an assessment tool that supervisors and the Moderation Committee merely need to check at the end of the semester (see 6.3.6). In Badar's case, it seemed that his practices were shaped by a belief that the teacher is expected to obey authorities and thus he should only use assessment techniques which would be checked by supervisors and the Moderation Committee. Also, as I discussed in 4.4.3.3, although the teachers in the follow-up interviews confirmed their strong beliefs reported in the questionnaire about using assessment results to provide regular feedback to parents, they stated that they did not do it due to lack of cooperation from parents and lack of time. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the innovation in



assessment seems to be more sensitive issue than some other types of curriculum innovation as it is linked with the certifying and grading of learners. There is therefore likely to be even stronger resistance to change, as stakeholders in the educational context such as ministry officials, school principals, parents and learners will be especially vigilant about any proposed changes that may affect outcomes (Hargreaves et al., 2002). As Wedell (2013, p.147) argues, teachers are not the only ones who are affected by change but there are

other components of, and actors in, the existing education system, together with members of the wider society, can also critically influence how teacher experience implementation.

The finding that the norms and behaviours in the working context affect the behaviour and attitudes of teachers when they are challenged by change is not very surprising. As I illustrated in Chapter 1 (see 1.4.2&1.4.3), the teachers of this study had much in common: same training opportunities, inspected by the same supervisors, their assessment practices checked by the same Assessment Moderation Committee and had very similar classroom settings. In addition, as we have seen from the quantitative data (see 4.6.3), the majority of the participants reported a range of contextual factors (some are cultural challenges, see Table 24) that seem to have contributed to the limited implementation of CA. This may indicate that the cultural challenges that the innovation poses on teachers' attitudes and practices are strong and thus these challenges affect their desire to innovate in such context. In the educational literature, Schweisfurth (2011, p.428) found, in her analysis of the findings of a range of studies about the implementation of learner-centred education, that the influence of the cultural norms and values on teachers when they are required to implement innovations is strong and that some types of curriculum innovation pose more cultural challenges than others. She provided the following example:

Teachers and parents are also likely to hold strong views on the role and nature of assessment, resisting or not understanding practices which go beyond summative examinations. (Schweisfurth, 2011, p.429)

Another aspect that is related to the cultural challenges is that CA came from the UK context which is culturally different from the Omani context. That is, the CA system was expected to work in the Omani educational context since it showed evidence of success in other contexts. The cultural challenge for teachers then could be their ability to adopt a system which was originally brought from the UK context where the norms and values are largely different from the ones in the Omani context (as I discussed in 2.4.1). For

example, in the task-based learning settings in the UK teachers can easily observe the learners while doing the tasks and make assessment notes of their CA. However, the classroom settings and the teaching approaches used by teachers in Oman do not appear to facilitate the implementation of CA as they are associated with the norms in the Omani context: i.e. (as we have seen from the four cases) learners' expectation of getting good grades, lack of cooperation from parents (as I discussed above and in 4.4.3.3), teachers' summative assessment practices due to the pressure of similar practices by peer teachers and a preference for teacher-centered approaches.

Regarding the latter, as the observation data showed from the four cases, the classroom interaction in the classes is mainly teacher-centred which does not seem to provide ideal opportunities for teachers to observe and listen to learners without being directly involved in the interaction. The CA system expects teachers to adopt some learner-centered approaches for the purpose of implementing some CA tools such as observation and talking notes (see 1.4), whereas the reality in the context does not seem to support this expectation. For example, lack of adoption of task-based learning and learner-centered approaches could be related to a cultural expectation that teacher should be the sole authority in the classroom whose priority is to maintain strict control of learners' behaviour (Emenyeonu, 2012). In that perspective, movement of learners in the class and making noise during lessons might be considered (by authorities in the school and others from outside the school) to indicate a lack of competence on the part of the teacher (Emenyeonu, 2012). Also, as we have seen from the four cases, the teachers tended to prioritize assessment procedures that allow them to focus on what makes their learners get good grades at the end. This could be due a cultural issue within the local community that the competence of teachers (this also apply to the effectiveness of head teachers, supervisors and local education officials) is judged mostly by their ability to ensure good results by the end of the year. In such circumstances, assessment that is not clearly linked to what makes learners get good grades might be seen as having little merit (Wedell, 2013). Using such approaches of CA perhaps was 'culturally challenging' for these teachers (Wedell, 2013, p.149). It seems that these cultural challenges were due to lack of fit between the expectation of CA reform, and what teachers needed to do in order to satisfy the norms and values within their community.

The finding that the context where the teachers work has an effect on teachers' beliefs and practices is broadly in line with the findings in the literature (Fang, 1996; Borg,

2003; Pajares, 1992; Basturkmen, 2012; Wedell, 2013; Wedell, 2009). For example, Fullan (1985) claims that the pressure of peer and other technical and administrative leaders may influence teachers' views regarding the expected innovation. In ELT, Cook (2010) found in her study that the major barrier to applying reform-oriented CLT practices in the Japanese EFL classes was the teachers' awareness of their learners' and colleagues' expectations of what should be taught and learned; the teachers faced a pressure of being ostracized by more senior teachers attempting communicative innovations. The influence of the workplace context has emerged in some studies which investigated teachers' assessment practices in both general and language education. For example, Davison (2004) in her study of the contradictory culture of teacher-based assessment (a comparison of ESL teacher assessment practices in Australian and Hong Kong secondary schools), found that one of the most influencing factors on teachers' assessment practices is teachers' beliefs about how others will evaluate their behaviour in the classroom which as a result make teachers alter their assessment practices according to those beliefs. Also, Daugherty (1996) in his evaluation of teacher assessment in England and Wales referred to the influence of some contextual factors such as the influence of moderation on shaping teachers' assessment practices inside the classroom. Similar reports in general education appear in relation of peer pressure effect. For example, Mansour (2009) observed that the socialisation effect of the context was so powerful that despite having differing beliefs about mathematics and its teaching, teachers in the same school were often observed to adopt similar classroom practices. Chen (2011) also found that one of the factors which led to the limited implementation of formative assessment by the teachers of English in China was its incompatibility with the characteristics and the nature of the Chinese cultural community of practice. She concluded that the formative use of the assessment was in conflict with the Chinese assessment tradition that values the product of learning more than the process of learning. Lam (2011) also reported on how teachers had to change their assessment techniques by assuming a more authoritarian role to overcome learners' resistance to use portfolios. She concluded that this was due a lack of fit between the assumptions of the portfolio assessment innovation which predisposed the learners negatively towards the proposed assessment and learners' ability to use it. Another example comes from Dowrich (2008), who described how teachers faced difficulties when they tried to implement CA in Trinidad and Tobago. He reported that these difficulties were due to the reality that the Ministry of Education required teachers to implement CA but failed to make the

necessary preparations which suit their cultural settings. Thus, as Shkedi (2006, p. 716) asserts "curriculum innovation is not about putting into place the latest curriculum. It means changing the cultures of teachers, classrooms, and schools"

While reaffirming the findings from the above studies, this study paid more attention to the way in which contextual realities, and teacher assumptions about them, shape teachers' assessment beliefs, attitudes and practices. This study investigated the mediation of contextual factors on teachers' beliefs and their actual assessment practices through the follow-up of this issue in the real assessment practice of four Omani teachers of English. In addition to parallels with the findings from educational research more generally, results of this study also resonate with those specifically in the field of ELT. Some of the available literature about assessment reforms in the field of ELT (see Table 3) highlighted the influence of the contextual factors on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices. For example, Shim (2008) reported that teachers' perception about parents' subjectivity and its negative effect on the assessment affected their practices of classroom-based assessment. Dowrich (2008) also, in his study in Trinidad and Tobago, found that the more experienced teachers showed less commitment to CA reform which had resulted in similar behaviour by other teachers in the school. However, this study is different in several ways. First, the findings of this study clearly highlight the mediation of cultural challenges on the relationship between teachers' beliefs and their actual practices under CA reform. Although previous research on assessment reforms considered the effect of contextual factors on teachers' behaviours in the classroom, it has not looked critically at the role of cultural factors in understanding the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices. The finding of this study regarding the effect of cultural challenges that the innovation poses for the existing norms and values are based on a detailed analysis of what actually happens inside the classroom. As described earlier in Chapter 3, teachers in this study were observed in their normal classrooms and interviewed immediately after each lesson observation; the assessment records used by them were also discussed during the post lesson interviews. This enabled me to compare more closely their stated beliefs about CA and their actual practices and look analytically at the factors that led to the discrepancy between the teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices.

As I have mentioned in Section 2.4, this CA innovation represented significant shifts in terms of what teachers do inside the classroom. This implies that teachers need support in

order to make these significant shifts. Wedell (2003, p.447) advises planners of innovation to consider how teachers would be supported in making the professional adjustments of the introduced English curriculum innovation. He further suggests that the "planners themselves need to be clear about what adjustments the proposed changes will necessary involve." Therefore, this study suggests that the planners of innovation need, at the planning stage, to predict any cultural conflicts that might occur as a result of the introduction of the innovation and thus to make the necessary preparation to make the teaching and learning settings in the context ready to implementing the imported innovation. Also, CA can be successful only when the policies and structures of this system are put in place according to the circumstances at the classroom level. I can argue here that in order for teachers to implement CA effectively, an awareness raising need to be made among the educational community (including teachers) of any conflict or any incompatibility that the proposed change might bring to characteristics and the nature of the context. Also, at the same time, teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and competencies that help them to deal with the new strategies and procedures of the system. This leads to the notion of teacher professional development which plays a central role in relation to putting change into practice (Fullan, 2013). Thus, as Fullan (2013) and ARG (2002) advise, the training of teachers regarding the implementation of innovation should start at the pre-implementation stage and continues during the actual implementation process of the innovation.

#### **9.6.4 Influence of top-down nature of the CA planning and implementation process**

The teachers' reluctance to engage with CA could be also attributed to the inappropriately top down nature of the innovation planning and implementation process. This in turn would help to explain the gap between teachers' stated beliefs about CA and what actually happens inside the classroom regarding CA implementation. If the innovation policy is not clearly communicated or outlined to implementers and if the innovators' needs are not taken into consideration in the planning of the innovation, conflict and frustration will emerge (Fullan, 2013; Wedell and Malderez, 2013). One common factor which may cause such conflict is that in most top-down reforms, policies are usually planned by people at the top level in the hierarchy of the organizations, who may not be aware of the contextual realities (Wedell, 2009). As I illustrated in 1.4.2, the planning for CA innovation did not seem to take into consideration the relevant people on the ground

(all stakeholders at different layers of the educational system), who were supposed to take the burden of the implementation process. Also, there was little evidence that the policy makers considered the beliefs and values of the implementers before starting to put the CA reform in place. Generally speaking, it appears that the role of contextual reality in affecting the implementation of CA reform was not given sufficient attention (see 1.4). For example, as it appears from the way that CA was introduced (see 1.4.2) and as we have seen from the discussion in this chapter regarding the reasons behind teachers' limited uptake of the CA practices, the policy makers at the Ministry level probably took for granted the assumption that teachers would see the advantages of CA reform, and consequently would easily adopt and implement it in practice. It seems that the planners of the CA reform did not consider the fact that CA implies a change in the way implementers behave and think and also what it implies for the educational community and to the roles of many stakeholders in the context.

Familiarization and awareness raising are considered to be vital for the success of any reform (Waters and Vilches, 2001). Wedell and Malderez (2013) emphasize the importance of a shared understanding of the overall policy among those responsible for guiding and determining various aspects, processes and stages of the reform. As I illustrated in 1.4.2, there was a lack of such awareness-raising programmes and spread of a shared understanding regarding the importance of CA among the people most directly affected by the CA reform. As we have seen from the examples I provided in the previous sections of this chapter, this CA innovation seemed to be posing a range of challenges to teachers' beliefs and practices and to the cultural norms and values of the Omani educational system; this contributed to the low level of commitment among teachers (and other people in different layers of the educational system) towards accepting (or adopting) it in real practice.

As I explained in the context chapter (see 1.4.2), one of the examples of inappropriate top-down planning and implementation process of the CA innovation was the attempt to inform teachers about the CA reform through a cascade model: supervisors and teacher trainers first receive central training in the capital city and then conduct the training in their regions. In the regions supervisors provide training to Senior Teachers with the intention to cascade training later on in their schools. As I discussed in 2.4.3, such a model of communicating the reform to the stakeholders may lead to policies and processes being interpreted differently by different people, and may not therefore be

sufficient for the needs of the implementers. Cascading training in this way does not seem to involve the large community of implementers and thus limited success would be obtained due to the fact that the learning process would be not the same for all end users (Assessment Reform Group, 2008). Within the field of ELT Wedell (2005, p.13) suggests that in order to maximise the chances of cascade aims being implemented in classrooms, the initial planning of cascade training needs

to ensure that the content, process and organization of the proposed training will equip the maximum number of trainees (at each level) with skills appropriate to the achievement of project aims.

In their investigation of teacher assessment in the UK contexts, Assessment Reform Group (2008) attributed the lack of clarity of the process of CA implementation among teachers to the failure of the cascade programme to reach the end users ( particularly teachers) and to consider the contextual factors surrounding the actual practice.

The Omani cascade programme was meant in the first place to target teachers only, without any consideration of other partners of the implementation process of CA such as parents, learners, head teachers and supervisors. As I discussed in the previous sections of this chapter ( and in the next section), this study provided examples of how this neglect undermined the reform's effectiveness: supervisors' emphasis on assessment of portfolios, parents' lack of commitment to CA, learners' continuing expectation to get high marks, teachers' summative assessment practices due to the pressure of the norms in the workplace. Therefore, as Wedell (2005) suggests, in order for a cascade model to meet the teachers' needs and reach the end users in their classrooms, individuals in all levels of the cascade need to be closely supervised and guided in their attempts to put the principles and approaches of the intended system into practice. The implementation requires that while the end users test and evaluate the innovation, they have to be monitored and supported in such a way that their understanding and expertise is gradually maximized (Wedell, 2005).

Another example of inappropriate planning and implementation process of innovation is the lack of consideration of providing training and support for the implementers of innovation. As we have seen from the quantitative part of the study, a high percentage of teachers (62.4) said that they did not receive any training about CA (see Table 25). Also in many places in the case studies (see Alzahra, Alwaleed, and Badar), such support was not available for teachers; they had not received adequate support to enable them to develop clear understanding of using CA and consequently their actual assessment

practices reflected their own experiences as well as their existing beliefs about using CA. We cannot expect teachers to immediately shift from familiar ways of assessment when the purpose of the new methods are not clear for them and they are difficult to apply in actual practice (Wedell, 2009). McLaughlin and Mitra (2001, p.307) argue about the effect of change on teachers:

Absent knowledge about why they are doing what they are doing, implementation will be superficial only, and teachers will lack the understanding they will need to deepen their current practice or to sustain new practices in the face of changing contexts.

The finding here reflects what the literature of educational innovation highlights regarding the influence of top down nature of educational reforms and the danger of underestimating the cultural values and norms of educational systems as well as the needs of those who are responsible for implementing the policy at various levels. Lack of consideration of such issues is likely to result in a lack of clarity which will in turn add to the mismatch between reform planning and its actual implementation. Wedell (2009) provided evidence, from case studies, that policy makers of reforms at the top level of organizations usually underestimate the contextual realities in their planning of reforms and therefore plan without considering the implementers' needs.

The finding in this study regarding the danger of top-down nature of the innovation planning and implementation process is broadly in line with the findings from both general and language education research. For example, Hargreaves et al. (2003), in their investigation of the implementation of interactive teaching in the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) in England, attributed teachers' reluctance to engage with interactive teaching to the difficulty in implementing it in practice due to factors related the pressures and overload of the NLS requirements. Moreover, Riley (2001) criticised the lack of consideration of teachers' training needs by the top-down planners of the NLS. She states that the training offered by the strategy concentrates on the mode of operation and implementation without considering the contextual reality. Back in Oman, Al-Lamki (2009), in his study about the beliefs and practices related to continuous professional development (CPD) of teachers of English in Oman, found that the ambiguity of the CPD system was due to the lack of shared guiding documents and communication gaps between the policy makers at the upper level in the ministry and the end users (particularly teachers).



### **9.6.5 Influence of long experience in teachers' resistance to implement CA**

Another point emerging in this study which may have led to the gap between the stated beliefs and actual practice is teachers' resistance to change due to the long experience factor. The influence of the long experience appeared more clearly in the case of Alwaleed who had 21 years of experience in teaching English. Alwaleed stated clearly in his comments about his failure to use CA in actual practice that he reached a stage in his experience where he can depend on his own judgment rather than following the officially sanctioned way of CA. The other teachers though had experience between 7-8 years, did not explicitly relate their low level of commitment towards CA to the experience factor. However, the data showed some evidence in which those teachers were reluctant in the interviews to reveal the absence of CA in their work due to the fear of losing face as experienced teachers. Also, all of them indicate that the absence of regular recording of CA in their work was for their belief that they can recall the information due to their experience of dealing with their learners. Alwaleed adhered more rigidly than the other teachers to this belief of relying on own experience, minimizing explicit attention to the official CA procedures. Thus, to different extents and at different times in his work, he neglected the CA procedures suggested by the CA guidelines and prioritised assessment procedures that allow him to focus on what makes his learners get good grades at the end of the semester. In this study, it was revealed that the teachers were not only resistant to the CA reform but they were more broadly resistant to implement the curriculum itself. There is evidence in the study of the extent to which the teachers were teaching in line with the principles of the curriculum. As we saw in the analysis, most of the teachers were not observed to use pair work or group work during their teaching. Over ten years after a major learner-centred ELT curriculum reform in Oman, one would expect to see some evidence of interactive work and this highlights a potential resistance to change in those teachers. That is, if their teaching had not changed in line with the curriculum, it is highly unlikely that their assessment practices would have. In addition, this attitude towards CA due to the influence of the experience factor revealed from the quantitative part of the study may indicate that this attitude may also exist in the large community of teachers. As the quantitative part of the study shows, nearly half of the teachers had experience ranging from 10 years to 30 years (49.6%) (see Table 13), and the majority of them reported a large discomfort regarding the implementation of CA (most of them reported a large number of challenges to implementing CA).

This study reflects the claim in the literature about the influence of teachers' long experience on their beliefs and as a result on their actual practices, but in an ELT context about CA reform. It provides support to some of the available literature in general education, which shows that more experienced people are more likely to show resistance towards change than those with less experience in teaching. For example, Sikes (2013 ,p. 45) takes the example of experienced teachers and argues that they tend to have a rather cynical view of attempts to introduce change. Moreover, Hargreaves (2005) reports that the more experienced teachers often tends to find difficulties accommodating change. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) also, in their literature review of teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion of new policies, concluded that more experienced teachers become less active and less engaged into the implementation of any inclusive policy. Also, in the area of assessment in general education, Dowrich (2008) also, in his study about teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the CA programme in Trinidad and Tobago, found that the more experienced teachers showed less commitment to CA implementation.

With regard to the discrepancy between the stated beliefs and actual practice, the finding in this study contradicts the results of Basturkmen (2012) recent research review in language education who found that experienced language teachers' stated beliefs are more consistently reflected in their real practices; though this review did not include studies in teachers' beliefs about assessment reforms. However, this study matches Basturkmen (2012, p.287) conclusion that "deeply held principles would be applied more consistently than principles acquired more recently." For example, the study showed that Alwaleed relied on summative assessment practices due his long experience of using them and thus his negligence of CA was due to the recent introduction of the system. Thus, this study confirms the finding in the literature of language education in that the beliefs of experienced teachers become more firmly embedded in their practices over time (Basturkmen, 2012, p.287). However, this study goes beyond the other studies of teachers' beliefs about assessment (see Table 3) in understanding the motive behind language teachers' assessment behaviour inside the classroom. Researchers about beliefs and assessment practices (e.g. Kapambwe, 2010) have investigated what teachers do in implementing assessment. However, no studies have examined the beliefs bases of these practices and, hence, portrayed these practices in the way teachers perceive them. The findings of this study suggest that since the influencing factors on teachers' beliefs and practices are likely to be hidden behind their actual practices and since studying teachers'

actual practices alone may provide a misleading idea of the reasons behind these practices, an understanding of the factors that lead teachers to make assessment decision in their real classroom can only be gained when both teachers' actual practices and beliefs are studied.

### **9.7 Teachers' elusiveness during the interviews**

In this study, the interviews were used to clarify from the teachers their assessment practices noticed during the observations, with the aim of exploring the thinking underlying the teachers' work. A common pattern emerging from the four cases was teachers' evasiveness during the interviews. Although the observation data showed clear evidence of their minimum attention to use CA, the teachers avoided during the interviews to be direct about the absence of CA in their work. Muhanad and Badar adhered most rigidly to this act, trying to avoid being explicit about their attitude towards CA; the other teachers, though, were also evasive and tried to avoid answering the questions about CA. One could criticize the validity of the data due to this behaviour by the teachers during the interviews. However, their evasiveness during the interviews did not affect accessing into their beliefs because observing the teachers during their routine duties and then comparing their comments from the interviews with their actual practices allowed me to make sense of their assessment practices, their attitudes towards the CA change and the beliefs which motivated their actual practices.

A possible reason behind this discomfort during the interviews could be due to my previous position as a supervisor. The teachers seemed to be cautious to openly reveal their attitudes towards CA due to my presence (though my status as a researcher was known to the participants and I did my best to minimize the effect of my previous role as a supervisor, see 3.13.6). Thus, the findings of this study support the argument in the methodology literature that the relationship between interlocutors in an interview will always shape the interaction (Dörnyei, 2007), and thus any researcher needs to consider this issue in the research design as it helps avoid a prescriptive orientation and develop greater sensitivity in handling qualitative interviews (Mann, 2011).

Another possible explanation for the teachers' reluctance to be explicit about the absence of CA in their work could be related to being cautious of revealing the information due to their seniority. This study showed evidence of this issue as the teachers in the four cases tried to avoid losing face during the interviews and they made real-time justifications of

their practices. As I discussed earlier in this chapter (see 9.6.5), it appeared that revealing their lack of commitment to CA implementation was a threat to their existing status and knowledge as experienced teachers due to their long experience in teaching (e.g. Alwaleed) and due to their status as senior teachers (e.g. Muhanad). Therefore, this study provides another example to the methodology literature of how the relationships in interviews influence what is said and the need to consider it in the data analysis and its effect on the data. This study thus confirms the finding of Orafi (2008) in which he concluded that teachers' beliefs cannot be studied merely through talking to teachers without first looking at teachers' classroom practices. It also supports the argument that inferences about beliefs can first start from observed practices, but verification for these practices must be gained through further sources (Borg, 2006b).

### **9.8 Limitations in studying beliefs through questionnaires**

This study highlights the limitations in studying beliefs through questionnaires – despite agreeing with CA on the questionnaire there was limited evidence in the four case studies of such beliefs in the teachers' work. This appeared more clearly in the case of Alwaleed as there was no evidence of the beliefs about CA he agreed on the questionnaire in his work. This study reflects the claim in the literature about the limitations in studying beliefs through questionnaires. For example, as I discussed in the methodology chapter (see 3.4.1), Borg (2006b) in his review of research on language teacher cognition highlights some limitation of studying teachers beliefs through questionnaires and advises that questionnaires are inadequate to be used on their own in situation where there is an interest in teachers' beliefs about real classroom practices. In addition, Phipps and Borg (2009) from their study conclude that qualitative strategies will be more productive means for understanding the relationship between language teachers' actual practices and beliefs than questionnaires. In general education, Kane et al. (2002, p. 177) in their literature review of research on teaching beliefs and practices of university academics found that "research that examines only what teachers say about their practice and does not directly observe what they do is at risk of telling half the story". Kane et al. (2002) highlight a concern about drawing conclusions regarding teaching practice based on espoused theories of teaching reported through self-report methods and thus they advise researchers to make links between teachers' beliefs and their actual practice by observing their work. Therefore, this study also highlights this issue that questionnaires are inadequate to be used on their own for studying the relationship between teachers'

beliefs and their practice and thus teachers' real practice need to be examined for evidence of such relationship.

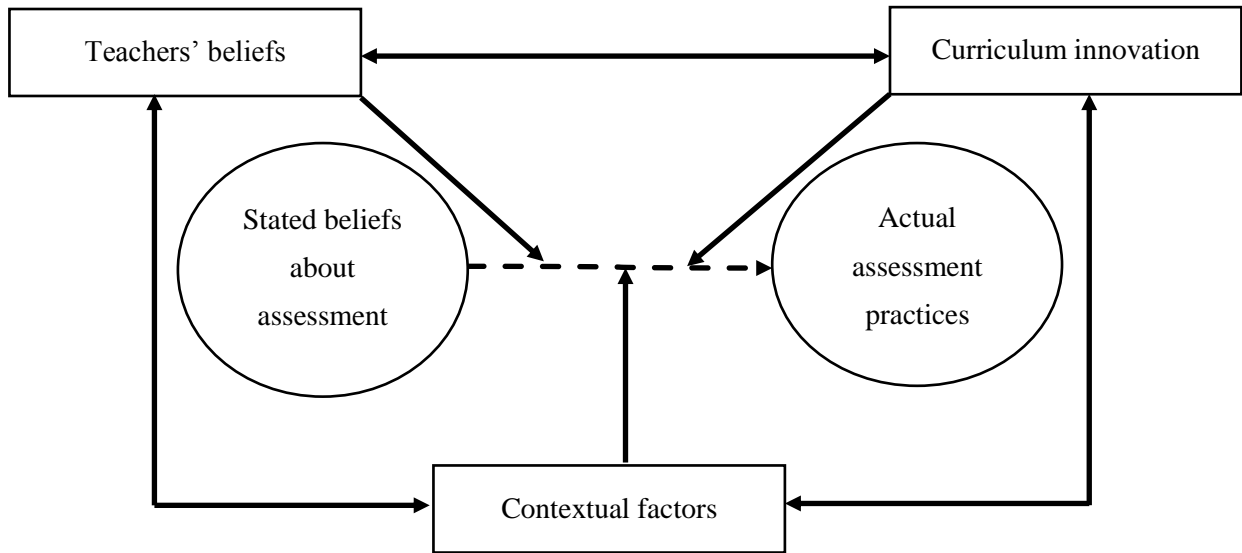
### **9.9 A model of factors affecting teacher practice in CA**

To conclude the discussion in this chapter, Figure 2 represents a model emerging from this study that provides a more general explanation of the factors that interact in shaping the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practice. It indicates that there is a complex range of factors, which interactively mediate the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs about assessment and their actual assessment practices and lead to limited uptake of reform in reality. The 3 rectangles in the diagram with arrows pointing to the dotted arrow between the two circles point to the complex range of factors (each rectangle 'contains a range of factors') which mediate the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs about assessment and their actual assessment practices. The dual arrows between the rectangles refer to the complex interplay between these factors for each teacher that leads to inconsistency between their 'beliefs' and practices and hence to the limited uptake of reform (the dotted arrow represents the process of putting stated beliefs into actual practice).

To illustrate how such complex interplay between these factors mediate the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practices, I provide the case of Muhanad as an example. Although in the questionnaire Muhanad generally expressed strong positive beliefs about the value of CA as an assessment approach, the complex interplay between the following range of factors mediated the relationship between his stated beliefs about assessment and his actual assessment practices: the tension between his peripheral and core beliefs (e.g. Although he had peripheral belief that learners should do several drafts of writing independently, he asked his learners to do their writing in the class under his invigilation because he thought this would be more beneficial for them), the influence of cultural factors (e.g. his learners' expectation of getting high grades), his experience as a senior teacher (e.g. some suggested CA procedures mismatched his long experience of dealing with his learners) and the influence of top-down nature of the CA planning and implementation process (e.g. lack of consideration of the circumstances at the school level).

In illustrating the interaction of all of the above factors influencing teachers' assessment behaviour in the real situation, the study, therefore, widens our general understanding of

the relationship between teachers' beliefs about assessment and their behaviour in the reality regarding their actual practices of assessment. It also provides evidence for the importance of considering teachers' existing beliefs about assessment and other contextual factors to understand the motive behind their actual assessment practices and their attitude towards assessment reforms. This, therefore, extends our current understandings of the implementation of CA and provides some implications for continuing research on the beliefs of language teachers on CA as well as for teacher education programmes for the provision of support for those teachers attempting to adjust their assessment beliefs. The next chapter discusses these implications.



**Figure 2: Understanding discrepancies between teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their actual assessment practices**

## **CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **10.1 Introduction**

The findings from this study regarding teachers' beliefs and CA implementation have powerful implications both for continuing research on the relationship between teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practice as well as for ELT teacher education. This chapter starts by addressing the study's limitations. Bearing in mind these limitations, it will then make claims about the contribution of the study. I then discuss the implications from this study and identify some suggested areas for further work. I conclude with a description of my personal reflection on the research process.

### **10.2 Limitations of the research**

This study was valuable in providing a conceptualization of teachers' assessment practices and their relationship with their beliefs under the CA reform. Yet, this study has some limitations that are acknowledged below.

While the mixed-method approach allowed for patterns in the quantitative data to be confirmed by, and explored further through, individual teacher portraits emerging through observation and interview data, it also restricted the size of qualitative data. I was only able to study four cases due to time and space constraints. Also, my decision to reduce the number of cases was made partially on the belief that I had sufficient data from the quantitative part of the study. As a result, I have less confidence in the qualitative data than I would have had, if I had been able to observe more teachers and increase the number of observations and interviews for each individual teacher. If this had been undertaken, it would also have been helpful to provide more of an insight into the relationship between beliefs and practices, and compare the stated beliefs of teachers with more examples of what occurs in practice.

I must acknowledge that there are probably many aspects of the motives behind teachers' actual practices that this study did not capture. Although this study revealed a range of factors which explained teachers' limited uptake of the CA reform, many other factors might not be captured due to teachers' evasiveness during the interviews: the teachers seemed to be cautious to openly talk about CA, perhaps due to my previous role as a



supervisor (although I did my best to minimize its effect). Therefore, the study would have got more access into the thinking behind the teachers' behaviours if I have recruited a co-researcher to conduct the interview instead of myself.

In this study, the written notes I made in the observation schedules, the copies of teachers' assessment records and the audio recording of the lesson, helped to capture as accurately as possible what occurred in the classroom. However, I must acknowledge that the main observation data came from the notes in the observation schedule and the copies of teachers' assessment records. Although the audio recording helped as an aid memory of events missed by the note taking, it did not provide a means of finding out about natural assessment behaviours as performed actively by the teachers within the real situation and the representations of the meanings behind those behaviours. The observed lessons were not videoed for fear of causing unnecessary stress to participants. However, if videotaping had been used, it would also have been helpful to provide a more accurate data of what happened in classrooms, which may have been missed by the observer. The videotaping would have been helpful for later confirmation of the observation data.

The study mainly focused on investigating the beliefs and assessment practices of teachers of English; although some senior teachers were involved, the study dealt with them according to their role as teachers of English. The study did not involve any other stakeholders such as regional supervisors, head teachers, or members of the CA Moderation Committee. Considering the views of those stakeholders on CA, and how it is implemented in practice, would have provided further insights about CA implementation. For example, as senior teachers are required to assist the implementation of CA in the schools, giving more focus to their role of helping teachers regarding CA and how they do this in practice, would have provided more explanation of teachers' limited uptake of CA.

Conducting the interviews in English may have influenced teachers' responses to a certain extent. The use of Arabic (the participants' L1) could have provided the participants with more confidence to express themselves. However, as I argued in (3.6), conducting the interviews in English helped in saving time required for translation, avoiding inappropriate interpretation and mistranslation and in providing direct quotes expressed by the interviewees themselves to support my arguments.

This study was limited to investigating teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual assessment practices of Cycle 2 teachers in Dhahira Educational Governorate. Therefore, the results obtained by this study are not necessarily true for the teachers of English in the other 11 educational governorates in Oman, though these educational governorates have similar educational systems, rules, and regulations as the ones in Dhahira. Also, the study illustrated issues specifically related to the Omani educational context; thus, it is context-bound. Still, the result of the study could be of interest and relevance to other contexts that share similar characteristics and conditions.

Despite these limitations, it is my personal belief that the study has generated rich data, which has contributed to the knowledge on teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practices.

### **10.3 Contributions**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, CA has a significant importance in the process of English language teaching and learning and there is evidence of its increasing role worldwide. However, as identified in the literature, CA implementation in practice has been associated with many challenges. This study makes a number of contributions to the ELT literature in particular and to the mainstream literature in general about the implementation of CA reform and the factors that contribute to the success or failure of it. First, reflecting on the findings discussed in the previous chapter, this study highlights the importance of studying both teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practices in order to understand the actual implementation of CA. That is, taking for granted teachers' stated beliefs about CA without looking at the extent of how these beliefs are consistent or inconsistent with the teachers' actual practices may provide inaccurate interpretation of how CA is implemented in practice. The limited consistency between teachers' stated beliefs about CA and their actual practices found in the study highlights the importance of understanding the reasons behind such mismatch to provide insights for the benefit of CA reforms. This study provides detailed insight into the role of teachers' beliefs, the contextual factors and the nature of CA reform in shaping how teachers implement CA in (real) practice and in hindering teachers from implementing CA practices, which are consistent with their stated beliefs. Thus, this study offers implications (I highlight in following sections) for CA systems developers, policy makers, change agents and teacher

educators in Oman and in other educational contexts where similar issues have been reported about CA implementation worldwide and for any future CA reforms.

Second, as illustrated in Chapter 2 and in the previous chapter, a very limited volume of research has been published on teachers' beliefs about CA and their relationship with teachers' actual practices. As I presented in Table 3, there is no published work, to the best of my knowledge, that has investigated the relationship between English teachers' stated beliefs and their actual practice with the aim of understanding teachers' CA practices in real situations under CA reform and the factors influencing those practices. The only published work is a small scale study by Al-Kindy (2009), but it only investigated teachers' attitudes towards CA and its effect on their work without exploring the tension between beliefs and actual practices and the factors that influence the relationship between beliefs and actual practice. Thus, this study is innovative in the area of research on English teachers' beliefs about CA and understanding CA implementation in real practice.

Third, most of the existing research in ELT on teachers' beliefs about educational innovations at classroom level, has been conducted in the area of curriculum innovations such as new or revised curriculum materials or new teaching approaches (new teaching strategies or activities). However, little research has been conducted in the area of language teachers' beliefs about educational assessment innovations, and how assessment is carried out in practice. This piece of research contributes by addressing the gap identified by studying English language teachers' beliefs about CA reform in the Omani context and how CA is implemented in real classrooms.

Fourth, the findings of this study could be of value to the Omani context. As I noted above, only one small-scale study (Al-Kindy, 2009) investigated Omani English teachers' attitudes towards CA and its effect on their work. That study only explored the attitudes of Grade 12 teachers towards CA, and was conducted in the same year of the introduction of CA. The present study signifies a continuation of the line of research which started along with Al-Kindy's (2009) study through looking at the teachers' beliefs about the CA reform from a broader perspective, as I argued above (see the second point). The educational significance of the study lies in the provision of an overview of the current situation of beliefs about and actual practices of CA as seen through the eyes of the Omani English teachers. Thus, this study may have cross-national implications, as similar issues have been reported about CA implementation in many countries around the

word, as discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.5). Therefore, the present study makes a contribution to the research in the area of English language beliefs about CA and their actual practices in general and in the Omani context in particular.

Fifth, in terms of the methodological contributions, as I noted in the previous chapter (see 9.1), this study provides another example of the usefulness of using triangulation to explore teachers' beliefs about CA and actual assessment practices. This suggests that studies that first employ quantitative strategies to explore language teachers' beliefs and then follow these up through qualitative strategies to look critically at their actual practices and beliefs can provide a more advanced understanding of the complex relationships between stated beliefs and actual practices.

Based on this study, I highlight the following potential implications for continuing research on English language teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practices and for teacher education.

#### **10.4 Methodological implications**

At the beginning of this chapter, I acknowledged the limitations of this study and as a result, I noted some other means of investigating the beliefs and practice relationship under CA reform. This study also suggests the following implications to research methodology, not only to further studies of teachers' beliefs about CA, but also to study of teacher beliefs about other aspects of ELT.

This study proves the importance of using teachers' comments on their own practices to gain an understanding of the motives behind their assessment decisions. The approach in this study was based on the belief that teachers' classroom behaviours are likely to be guided by some implicit beliefs and thus teachers' comments on their assessment decisions make those beliefs more explicit.

This study illustrates the importance of considering in the research design the issue that the relationship between interlocutors in an interview will always shape the interaction. As Mann (2011) notes, considering such issues in the research design helps avoid a prescriptive orientation and develop greater sensitivity in handling qualitative interviews. He suggests that more attention needs to be paid to what the interviewer is bringing to the interview and analyse its effect on the data. Mann (2011) cites numerous studies which have used interviews but omitted analysis of the interviewer role in the production of data

and how this affected the data. Nevertheless, this study considered in the data analysis the aspect of the interviewer's identity and also the detail how this might have played out in the interviews. It suggests, as a result, that when analysing the data emerging from the interviews, consideration to be given to the complexities of the interview's influences on the data produced.

Having here explained the implications for research methodology gained from this study; in the following, I illustrate the educational implications.

## **10.5 Educational implications**

The discrepancy found in this study between teachers' stated beliefs and their actual assessment practices, and also teachers' limited uptake of CA in practice, provides implications for policy makers in the Omani MOE, that even though CA has proved effectiveness in theory, teachers do not usually translate it directly into the classroom reality. That is, the policy makers should not take for granted the assumption that teachers would see the advantages of CA reform, and consequently would easily adopt and implement it in practice, but they should understand that CA reform implies a change in the way teachers behave and think. Therefore, attention needs to be given to the requirements embodied within the CA reform and what they imply for teachers' classroom practices and to role of teachers' beliefs and other contextual factors in affecting the implementation of CA reform.

In the following sections, I suggest some implications to the MOE in Oman for managing CA reform and for teacher education. These implications can apply to any similar CA reform elsewhere.

### **10.5.1 Implications for managing CA reform**

Waters and Vilches (2001) suggest a needs analysis framework of four hierarchically-arranged levels for maximizing the adoption and ownership of ELT innovations. These four levels are familiarization, socialization, application, and integration. I draw here some implications from this study, in the light of this framework, to the reform planners and policy makers. These implications could be useful for what should have been done before the introduction of the current CA reform, what need to be done now to improve it and what should be done for any future CA reform.

The most basic level is familiarization, it involves the implementers of the innovation being well informed about the reform (Waters and Vilches, 2001). A programme of raising awareness of the rationales behind using the CA system should start at the country level for all the stakeholders including teachers, supervisors, teacher educators, and Moderation Committee members. At this level, the main aim is to make sure that everybody in the educational system is aware of CA, its principles, objectives, benefits, advantages and disadvantages. This could be communicated through various channels in which all concerned people can get access to know about CA and understand its rationale. Visits to schools by specialised advisors in CA can be made where meetings with teachers can be held and discussion about the implementation of CA in reality can be run. Other means of communication can be used to convey the message about CA to all stakeholders in general and to teachers in particular, such as, educational TV programmes, leaflets, educational newsletters, teachers' forums and social media.

Socialization is the next level up, it comprises giving opportunities for the implementers to experience an initial innovation model and provide input into the needs analysis process, so that the initial model of the innovation is evaluated for its fit with the beliefs, and socio cultural preconceptions of the participants in the educational system (Waters and Vilches, 2001). In the case of CA reform, discussions could be held, in which teachers, supervisors, teacher trainers, head teachers, and parents are given opportunities to give feedback to the reform designers on how the CA procedures and its underlying principles and methods do or do not fit in with the existing beliefs and assumptions of those who are required to use and supervise the CA system. Another means, a survey of needs analysis could be conducted across the country to explore teachers' attitude, needs, challenges and expectation of the CA system. Feedback from these strategies could be used for the planning purposes of CA reform. In the case of the current CA system, the feedback can inform policy makers about the current situation of the reform, and what is actually happening in practice, which will feed into plans for taking actions to improve it.

The third level up is the application level and at this level monitoring and support is provided to the end users while they "test the worked-out innovations in such a way that the necessary level of personal, practical understanding and expertise is built up" (Waters and Vilches, 2001, p.134). To provide implication for CA reform based on this level, educational supervision should play a more critical role in supporting and facilitating the implementation of CA. The type of supervision is one that enhances on-going support of

CA implementation with emphasis on assistance rather than on teacher evaluation. For example, teachers need to be supported in CA techniques like observation of learners and how to take notes of their learners' progress and to be informed on the principles of reflection on their CA practices. The supervisors, senior teachers and teachers also collaborate around difficult practices of CA and how to put the principles and techniques of CA into practice.

The uppermost level is the integration and at this level the focus is given to

the innovation to become the personal 'property' of the users, through its further development, in ways determined as far as possible by the users' individual priorities. (Waters and Vilches, 2001, p.134)

The implication for CA reform is that teachers' attempts to implement the CA system should be linked to their own professional development programs, in which support and supervision are provided directly during the implementation process. At this level, the implementation process should be monitored, such as how the implementation of the new skills and practices of CA match or mismatch teachers' own beliefs and values and what are the challenges that affect teachers' ability to put these skills and practices into practice. To achieve this level of change, teachers need to be given opportunities to reflect upon their own practices during school-based professional development programmes and in-service teacher training. As Harris (2003, p.378) explains:

Change in the classroom therefore involves...changes in attitudes, beliefs and personal theories in order to reconstruct a personal approach to teaching. This cannot be achieved unless there are opportunities to reflect upon their practice and the practice of others.

In the next section, I provide examples of such school-based professional development programmes and in-service teacher training.

Besides these general implications drawn from this study in the light of the above framework by Waters and Vilches (2001), I suggest here more implications to the MOE in Oman regarding the current CA system. This study highlighted a range of contextual factors that led to the limited implementation of CA. Therefore, we cannot simply blame the teachers for this limited uptake of CA. If the Omani educational system is willing to improve the level of English language teachers' implementation of CA, there should be many aspects of the CA reform that need to be considered critically reviewed.

First, by examining the results of the study, the lack of uptake of CA indicates that some aspects of CA seemed to be inappropriate to the Omani context. Thus, it is vital for

educational policy makers within the Omani educational context to look critically at the CA system and examine its suitability to the educational system in Oman. In-depth investigations of all aspects of CA are highly recommended in order to develop a more focused view of the extent at which CA is appropriate to be implemented in Oman. That is, the CA system needs to be evaluated for its fit with the existing beliefs and assumptions of those who are required to use it and whether the settings and the circumstances in the reality is suitable for CA implementation. In such evaluation, all social, political and cultural aspects of the Omani context need to be taken into consideration. As a result of this evaluation, strategies then need to put in place by MOE in Oman in order to support the implementation of the CA reform in practice. Feedback from this study could inform an evaluation of the current CA reform and any plans for any future reforms.

Second, all the stakeholders including educational officials, assessment planners, policy makers, senior teachers, supervisors and teacher trainers need to commit to this process. The results of this study suggested that lack of commitment towards CA implementation from other staff might affect the teachers' desire to practice CA. Also, research shows that lack of support from other staff may affect teachers' desire to continue using the intended reform. On the other hand, a collaborative culture in the workplace context is more likely to enhance the implementation of the recommended reform and also lead to professional growth and ongoing development. Also, making such research results available in research papers, conference presentations and teachers forums would raise awareness among the ELT community in Oman for the implications of these results.

### **10.5.2 Implications for teacher education/development**

To make the best use of the research, consideration needs to be given to how the findings of research on teachers' beliefs and practices can be exploited in teacher education programmes. I highlight the following potential implications for the MOE in Oman in particular and for teacher education in ELT in general.

The results of this study on teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual practices reflected the reality of CA implementation as seen through the eyes of the implementers themselves and also reflected teachers' actual practices. Therefore, designers of teacher education programmes in Oman should make use of the outcomes of this study to inform teacher-training programmes about CA reform.



The study showed that contextual factors and teachers' beliefs have a major effect on what teachers do inside the classroom. Research shows that teachers often are not aware of the influence of such beliefs and contextual factors on their actual assessment practices. This suggests the need for in-service training sessions

to encourage teachers to reflect on their own professional practice, to make explicit to themselves the assumptions that underlie what they do and then to review those assumptions in the light of new perspectives and practices. (Whitney and Hedge, 1996, p.122)

As Shamim (1996, p.120) writes,

It is important for teacher trainers to encourage participants in teachers training programmes to discuss both overt and 'hidden' barriers to the successful implementation of change in their own teaching/learning contexts. This will not only make trainees aware of potential sources of conflict but it will also enable them to develop strategies and tactics to deal with anticipated problems in initiating and managing change in their own classrooms.

The portraits of assessment practices and teachers' beliefs such as those I have provided in the data analysis can be a good means for facilitating such teachers' reflection. These portraits can be included in teacher education curricular (both in-service and pre-service) so that teacher trainers and their teachers examine the meanings in the examples of teachers' actual classroom episodes and of quotes from teachers' own analysis of their work. The training activities can be designed to help teachers discuss the factors and motives that underlie the actual CA implementation and reflect on them as a preparation to enable those prospective teachers to manage their own CA practice and explore the cognitive bases of their work. Levin (1995) in her study found that discussions based around cases is valuable as they can lead to clearer, more elaborated understandings about the issues in the case studies and they provide a means for recognizing the need to change or articulate one's thinking. Case discussions have the potential to foster reflection and promote metacognitive thinking (Levin, 1995).

The findings revealed that the majority of teachers of this study said they did not attend any training to implement CA in their classroom. This was mainly due to the large number of teachers in the region where the study conducted. Thus, the policy makers should put in place plans to equip senior teachers with the necessary skills to enable them to provide school-based professional development in schools. In such school-based professional development, there would be more opportunities for senior teachers to follow-up the implementation of CA during practice as well as to provide immediate support and assistance to teachers about CA implementation in real practice. Such

school-based teacher training schemes may be more feasible and effective as they can draw on teachers' experience in the real context and thus teachers can discuss their beliefs and practices in relation to CA (Bailey et al., 2001). The process of engaging teachers in discussion of the relationship between beliefs and practices can be beneficial for teachers. Teachers' own awareness of such a relationship can serve as a means for teacher learning and can encourage them to explore their own beliefs and teaching in greater depth (Bailey et al., 2001).

An example of such school-based teacher development schemes that can facilitate the discussion and help on drawing on experiences of teachers is peer observation (Gottesman, 2000). Peer observations can be conducted in schools under the leadership of the senior teachers. It allows teachers to observe each other in a secure and supportive environment and assist one another in reflecting on their own practices on a regular basis (Cosh, 1999; Gottesman, 2000). The three sessions of peer observation (pre-observation, observation, post-observation) could be used for exploring issues of CA practices, which will be the focus of the teachers' reflection and discussion. For example, in the pre-observation session, teachers can agree upon some aspects of CA or their own assessment practices that both the observer and the observee need to explore and have feedback about. In the observation session, the observers focus on the aspects that they agreed to be explored and then these aspects will be the focus of the discussion in the post-observation session. In such peer observation strategy, teachers could focus on practices required by the CA guidelines, in which teachers can examine critically and discuss their own behaviours in relation to those practices and reflect about them. Some examples of such practices are taking assessment notes while teaching, assessing individual learners, using evidences of learners' work for the purpose of assessment and providing feedback to learners as part of CA. Teachers may benefit from the discussion about and the reflection on their own practices as they will be directly linked with evidence from the real practice. However, such school-based professional development strategies should be guided and facilitated under the leadership of the senior teacher in the school (senior teachers in the school also need to receive training about this issue in the first place). To facilitate teacher's discussion and communication, the senior teacher can organize workshops, presentations and online forums on issues gained from such classroom observations conducted at school level.

Another issue that teacher education can address is teachers' resistance to change. The study showed that one of the factors that might have led to the gap between the stated beliefs and actual practice is teachers' low level of commitment to do CA in practice and also teachers' resistance to change due to their long experience. Policy makers in Oman can address this issue by designing in-service professional development programmes to help those teachers accept the CA reform. Fullan (2011) argues that in order for people to accept change they need to have intrinsic motivation to do it and he suggests four core strategies necessary for intrinsic motivation to work and to have a deep and sustainable success:

- The change should have a strong purpose, value and clear meaning for people.
- The change is important to them.
- There is a degree of autonomy so that people can exercise judgment in making their way through change.
- People connect to others and also collaborate in relation to accomplishing the purpose of change.

Therefore, the teacher education programmes should recognise these strategies in order to convince people to accept the CA reform. Such programmes need to recognise teachers' expertise, and their potential resistance to change. The training can include activities that reinforce their enthusiasm for implementing CA, develop their understanding of the rationale behind it and make them aware of the purpose, value and the meaning of implementing CA in their practice. The training activities should be designed to help teachers try themselves to examine the positive aspects, the values and the advantages of CA and discover its importance and how it is valuable for developing the process of teaching and learning. Such professional development activities should be designed to meet the needs and desires of the experienced teachers and have the potential to encourage them towards trying to use the procedures required by the CA system. The activities should encourage teachers to discuss the potential advantages and disadvantages of CA procedures and that these procedures are something that can be questioned. Teachers should be given opportunities to uncover the principles underlying the CA change and relate such principles to their own practice. In the activities, the teachers need to see the impact of the CA innovation on daily classroom procedures and how it can be successful in reality. The development activities may be derived from classroom experiences of other experienced teachers who already tried CA in practice and find it useful. Teachers, therefore, can see that what they are being asked to use is

grounded in the experience of colleagues who have similar experience, and is not only abstract theory of the Ministry official requirements (e.g. other experienced teacher demonstration, videotaped practices, and examining real CA practices). In addition, they need opportunities to reflect on their own experiences, talk to their colleagues about them and discuss ways of how to put CA into practice. Above all, they need to be able to extend knowledge gained from such training to their actual classroom practice.

### **10.6 Suggested areas for further work**

Based on the findings of the study, further work may be carried out in a number of areas. Below, I make suggestions for further research within the Omani context. However, the suggestions may also apply to other contexts.

As this study has provided insights into the implementation of CA reform, I would suggest that more research of this kind would provide insights both in Oman and elsewhere. Building on the insights highlighted in this study, further quantitative and qualitative study of practices and beliefs about CA in a wider range of teachers would be valuable.

This study showed evidence of learners as having an impact on how teachers implement CA in practice. As this study only focused on teachers of English as the implementers of CA, further research is needed to examine learners' perceptions of it. For example, as it is expected that learners take an active part in the CA process, to be given feedback regularly as a result of CA, and to be informed about the CA criteria, then it is important to understand what learners think about these expectations and to what extent such expectations exist in reality from learners' point of views.

Finally, this study involved teachers of English in Cycle 2 Schools (Grades 5 - 9) where the weighting for CA is 40% of the assessment system. Further research may consider looking at teachers of English in Cycle 1 Schools (Grades 1 - 4) where CA is the only assessment approach. Building on insights from this study, further research would provide more insights about teachers' beliefs about CA and their actual assessment practices when assessment depends wholly on CA.

## **10.7 Personal reflections**

To conclude, here are some comments on how this study has contributed to my own development.

Going through the long journey of this research, I have been overwhelmed by a mixture of feelings of anxiety, frustration, satisfaction and enjoyment. Leaving my family behind and living abroad in a foreign country to commence the process of this research was a challenging experience. However, my family support and encouragement throughout this journey, together with the moments of achievement, was a great support to me. Also, sharing feelings with my supervisors and other research students helped in maintaining interest to continue the work on the study.

Going through the stages of this research has been a learning experience for me. I realised that having a clear awareness of the research topic from the very beginning and having a passion about it makes one continue through the stages of the study with determination, confidence and interest. In addition, my strong beliefs about the importance of this research, and its contribution to existing knowledge, helped in maintaining my enthusiasm to continue the work through to the end.

I learned that being systematic and organised throughout the stages of the research with much commitment and time management helps to make ongoing improvements to the work, reducing feelings of stress and anxiety. There have been times when I learned so much about myself, the ways I prefer to work, what motivates me to work and how to set priorities. I learned through this process a range of skills and strategies of problem-solving, working within groups and decision-making. Through interaction with colleagues and peers I learned a great deal about other cultures, firstly through communication with the British environment and people, and secondly through interaction with other international research students.

I learned that I need to take ownership of my research and make good use of the supervision meetings. I realised that my supervisors are collaborators on my research and thus I need to work with them, understand the challenges they give me, share ideas with them, and together create solutions to the existing problems.

As a novice researcher, this study helped me develop many research skills, starting from the research design stage to the writing up of the thesis. I realised that doing research is

not a straightforward process and that even for the researcher who may think that he/she is capable of doing research and aware of the research context, there are certain difficulties and challenges that may be encountered. This gives me the confidence to carry out any further research needed in Education.

Going through this research process has made me more sympathetic with teachers in general, and with English teachers in Oman in particular. It has made me more aware of the situation in my context, and have given me an appreciation of the difficulties that teachers face when they are required to implement educational reforms. The research period also helped me to become more analytical of my work environment, look at it critically through the eyes of scientific research enquiry, question policies and try to make sense of challenges or needs required in any reform implementation process. I realised that any reform implementation needs to be informed by a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the innovation strategies that are likely to be effective in any given development.

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## APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questionnaire

University of Leeds, School of Education

Dear Teacher,

As part of my PhD I am conducting a study of teachers' beliefs and practices about assessment and I would like to invite you to participate in this study by completing this questionnaire. Your responses to the items in this questionnaire are very important. They will be used exclusively for the study and will be regarded as **confidential**, no personal details of any respondent will be mentioned in the findings, nor will any of the results be related to any particular teacher or school. Participation in this study is voluntary. I would like to stress that **this is not a test**. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. I am interested in your personal opinion so please give your answers sincerely as only this will guarantee the success of the study. Please answer all questions and return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

After the questionnaire I will also be carrying out some observations and interviews to find out more information about teachers' assessment practices. If you are interested in participating in this second stage of the research please confirm by giving your details at the end of the questionnaire. Participation in this second stage will also be completely voluntary. You can contact me for further questions about the study through my email below.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

The researcher

Name: Omar Al-Sawafi  
Email: edu1mosm@leeds.ac.uk  
Position: PhD Student  
University: University of Leeds  
Department: School of Education

Section 1: Personal Information (Please put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box for items 1-7 and complete 8)

- 1. Gender:** Male  Female
- 2. Nationality:** Omani  Non-Omani

**3. Years of experience as a teacher of English:** 0- 5 years  6 - 10 years  11-15 years   
 16 - 20 years  21-25 years  26-30 years  more than 30 years

**4. Highest teaching qualification:** Diploma  BA  MA  PhD

**5. Position:** Senior Teacher  Teacher

**6. Your school is classified as:** Cycle Two (5-10)   
 Combined School (Cycle Two & Post Basic)  Other (please specify) -----

**7. On average, how many learners are there in the classes you are teaching this year?**  
 10 or below  11-15  16-20  21-25  more than 25

**8. The Grade(s) that you are teaching this year:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Section 2:** Teachers' beliefs about assessment

For questions 1–20 please tick (✓) **ONE** box to give your opinion for each statement.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about assessment?

		1	2	3	4	5
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
	The main aim of assessment is understanding learners' progress.					
	Assessment is best organized formally at dates and at times previously decided.					
	An important aim of assessment is evaluating teachers' effectiveness.					
	Focusing on learners' final achievements is an important function of assessment.					
	Learners need to be involved in the process of assessment.					

It is important that assessment takes place continuously throughout the year.						
Ranking learners is an important function of assessment.						
It is important for learners to know the criteria they are assessed against.						
Teachers need to take full control of the assessment process.						
One exam at the end of the year is the best way to assess learners.						
Exams need to be produced for all regions by the Ministry of Education.						
Providing regular feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment.						
Assessment is best conducted at the end of learning process.						
Assessment needs to be based on continuous observations of learners' progress.						
Assessment needs to be based on a variety of assessment methods.						
Remedying learners' weakness is an important aspect of assessment.						

	The main aim of assessment is determining learners' achievement.					
	Teachers need to use the assessment results to inform their teaching.					
	Learners need to be assessed mainly on the content of the course book.					
	Providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress is an important aspect of assessment.					

**Section 3:** Teachers' understanding of continuous assessment

Which of the following assessment practices would you describe as continuous assessment? For statements 1–12 please put a tick (✓) in the box based on the three options: **1** = Continuous Assessment (**CA**); **2** = Not Continuous Assessment (**NCA**); **3** = Not sure (**NS**).

		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
		<b>CA</b>	<b>NCA</b>	<b>NS</b>
	Teachers observe learners' performance during everyday classroom teaching.			
	Teachers give learners one test at the end of the year.			
	Teachers record learners' progress during everyday classroom teaching.			
	Teachers use assessment results to inform their teaching.			
	Teachers use a variety of assessment methods to evaluate learners' progress.			
	Teachers award marks to learners according to their performance in one exam.			

	Teachers use assessment tasks that are similar to everyday life.			
	Teachers give model tests to prepare learners for the end year exam.			
	Teacher makes an on-going collection of work done by the learner.			
	Teachers provide regular feedback to learners on their progress.			
	Learners evaluate their own performance regularly.			

**Section 4:** Teachers' current practice of continuous assessment

**A.** Do you use continuous assessment in your classroom? Please place a tick (✓) in the box.

<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

**B.** If you do use continuous assessment, please provide up to three examples of your continuous assessment practices otherwise go to C.

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....

Now skip C and go to D.

**C.** If not, please specify the factors or reasons for not using continuous assessment in your classroom.

- 1. ....
- 2. ....
- 3. ....
- 4. ....
- 5. ....

**D.** Have you taken any training programme(s) related to the implementation of continuous assessment? Please place a tick (✓) in the box.



Yes	No

E. If yes, please write about it/them below.

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If you are interested in participating in the second stage of the research which involves carrying out some observations and interviews to find out more information about teachers' assessment practices, please tick (✓) the box.

Yes  No

If yes, please leave your email address: -----

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE PUT  
IT IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED FOR COLLECTION

## APPENDIX 2: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE (MUHANAD)

Date: 13.03.2012      Grade: 10/1      Seating: rows      Topic: Languages (why English)  
 Teacher: Muhanad      Duration: 41 minutes      No of students: 28      Materials: Class books, Workbooks, Tape recorder

<b>Principles</b>	
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	T puts the following note in the assessment section of his lesson plan: "assessing specific learners".
<b>Role of the teacher</b>	T stands most of the time in the front of the class, initiates questions and elicits answers from ss. Selects some specific ss to answer his questions about the model verbs, if the s does not answer his question, he selects another one and then repeats the correct answer to the whole class. Explains to the whole class the topic of the lesson and gives some information about languages in the world. Asks ss to read the dialogue in the class book silently, then nominates 2 ss to read the dialogue aloud (ss read in turns), helps them with the pronunciations. Asks ss to discuss in pairs how to do the task (there is not much interaction between ss during the pair work, some ss in the back of the class talk in Arabic). Nominates ss to participate. Goes around the class and monitors some specific ss. Repeats ss' answers to the whole class with louder voice. Asks ss to do the exercise, goes around and observes them while working. Introduces conjunctions task, checks ss' understanding of conjunctions, asks individual ss to give examples, writes the examples on the board. Asks the whole class to complete the exercise in writing, goes around and talks to individual ss. Asks the whole class to prepare for the next lesson (do the reading texts for the next lesson).
<b>Feedback</b>	Gives oral feedback (corrects ss' pronunciations, sentence structure and grammatical errors), not clear that the feedback is given to the ss as a result of CA.
<b>Use of CA tools and records</b>	No use of any assessment registers during the lesson, no informal note taking (record keeping) made by the teacher.
	After the lesson T shows me: CA summary sheet (last semester), written notes about ss' presentations, lesson preparation register, samples of ss' writing with feedback, checklists for awarding marks for presentations.

## **APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (MUHANAD)**

### **Interview 1**

#### **Part 1: questions about the teacher's responses to the questions in the questionnaire**

1. You strongly agreed with the first statement in the questionnaire about using assessment for the purpose of understanding learners' progress? Would you explain this more for me?
3. In your opinion, why it is important for assessment to take place continuously throughout the year? You gave a very high response to this statement in the questionnaire?
4. You strongly agreed with the statement about involving learners in the process of assessment? Why do you think it is important to involve students in the process of assessment?
5. In the questionnaire you talked about the difficulties you face when assessing your students' speaking skills. Why it is difficult?
6. Do you have any other problems with CA implementation?
7. In the questionnaire you agreed strongly in teachers' full control of assessment. Why do think that the teacher should take full control of assessment?
8. Why do you think providing feedback to learners on their progress is an important aspect of assessment? You gave a very high response to this statement in the questionnaire?
10. Why do you think assessment should be based on a variety of assessment methods? You gave a high response to this statement?
11. You strongly agreed with the statement about providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress, why do you think so?

#### **Part 2: questions about the teacher's practices from classroom observation**

1. In your planning for lessons, do you usually set CA objectives to be achieved in every lesson you teach?

2. Do you normally make links between CA and the lesson's objectives?
3. In the assessment part of your lesson plan you included some comments about observing individual students, what was the purpose of doing so?
4. What was the purpose of the oral questioning you did all through the lesson?
5. The interaction during the lesson was mainly T-P; does this have any relation with CA of students?
6. I observed you going around and checking students' work, what was the purpose of doing so?
7. You asked students to read aloud several times during the lesson, what was your aim behind that?
8. I saw you focusing on some specific students to answer your questions or to participate during the lesson, what were your aims for doing so?
9. I saw you talking to students at the back and checking their work? Why?
10. What was your purpose of giving feedback to individual students in the class? I saw you doing so many times during the lesson?
11. In what ways do you use assessment results to inform your teaching?
12. What types of assessment techniques do you use to assess your students?
13. I didn't notice you using any assessment registers during the lesson, how do you keep a record of their performance you notice in every lesson?
14. Do you think using CA records is necessary in the process of assessment?
15. You selected two individual students to act the dialogue; did you select them intentionally for the purpose of assessing their speaking?
16. I observed you helping students with pronunciations, what was your purpose of doing so?

## **APPENDIX 4: TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER MUHANAD**

Date: 14/03/2012

Duration:28m. 36s.

O = Omar Al Sawafi (the researcher and interviewer)

M = Muhanad (interviewee)

### **Part 1: Teachers' assessment practices:**

Greetings.

O. Ok, Mr. Muhanad, we will continue what we have started on Monday. Last time I was asking you about the difficulties you are facing when implementing CA especially with speaking skills, you talked about that, just I would like you to tell me whether you are facing other difficulties regarding CA implementation. 27:33

M. Actually, it is more obviously in speaking and actually we are having some similar problems in assessing writing skill. If students are used to the criteria of the CA or assessment itself, it will be smoothly done by them, but if there is a gap between teachers' instruction. You have to implement it and you have to use the criteria gradually, for example, if I ask them to do the interactive writing without informing them about the criteria, they will ask me what kind of interactive writing? What do you mean by interactive? If I give them topics which are related to interactive writing, writing emails for example, someone will bring me just a paragraph, maybe he wrote it himself, or copied from a book or written by somebody else and he will think I will give a mark for it. So, I read it, I mark it as a copy but I ask him to do another one for me. 26:04

O. Regarding this aspect you have just mentioned, do you mean that students do not submit their actual work, does that mean they tend to copy or ask someone else to do their writing and when they do so you will not be able to identify their actual progress? 25:44

M. Let's be frank, some teachers will give them the mark but I do not do that, I have to read all the paragraphs of the writing, every individual word, sometimes I mark these words as spelling mistakes, sometimes grammatical or syntax or something that needs to be done again. From doing so, I notice whether the work is written by the student or not. So, actually I need the actual work which is done by the student even if it is not that much good, what I need to see that his efforts is translated into work. But, unfortunately some teachers gave the students the mark (though they knew the written work was not done by students). Students thought that I will be doing the same, for that reason I wanted them to know my way of assessing their written work and of course to make it clear to them that I don't want perfect work but I want to see that their efforts are translated into work. So, sometimes, I ask them repeat the work and sometimes I unexpectedly ask them to do it in

the class. This will give me chance to see their actual performance and to let them practice in an environment which is similar to the final exam. 24:05

O. Ok, is practicing for the final exam is a concern for you? 23:55

M. in such Grade yeah it's a concern because, as you know, when we reach this limit of teaching students we have only less than four months to prepare the students for the final exam. So we are doing the teaching and also on the other side we put in mind that we are practicing similar questions that they will face in the exam. 23:29

O. This regarding the problems or the challenges that you are facing when implementing CA, one more point which aroused my interest, you belief strongly in teacher's full control of assessment and as you know the idea of CA, we need to give chances to students to take part in the process of assessment? So would you explain this more for me, why it is so important for you that teacher take full control of assessment? 22:26

M. actually, when you assess students, you observe them daily, you notice the kind of improvement they are doing. So it's about the teacher's teaching, it's about the curriculum, and also about students ability. All these three factors are important, if the teacher don't focus on assessment and he just does the teaching apart from assessment and apart from the action plans or the remedial plans for weak students, he will have a gap. Let's say, you might do the teaching and you want to assess students maybe next week or during the semester about the narrative writing but you don't involve the students in such kind of narrative writing (doesn't inform them of the criteria they are assessed against). So if you go and ask them I want you to do narrative writing and you leave them, you will find that the students will not be able to do it and if you give them bad marks, their motivation will be down, so when you do so you are making a gap between your teaching and assessment. 20:51

O. so, you think about controlling the assessment by you or by the teacher in sense of following-up the progress of students and the process of the assessment? 20:38

M. Yes, yes, of course. 20:37

O. Is that your understanding of full controlling of the assessment? 20:33

M. yes, and I told the students actually, the students are the learning centre, maybe that you are very rich in your language, you know how to teach the subject but you don't understand the students' level. Assessment is not meant only for one student but for all students, so you have to differentiate between students, their individual differences and also when to use this kind of assessment. Even so, sometimes, in the assessment document they will ask you sometimes to do the interactive writing in the beginning but it is not necessary because maybe the students are not ready yet. So you can delay this one (interactive writing) and you ask them to do it later on. 19:45

O. OK 19:44

M. and when I inter the class for the first time, I inform the students of my system and what kind of disciplines I expect from them. Also, I tell them this period is 40 minutes only, it's your responsibility to understand, 99% is your responsibility, if I entered the class and I taught you something and you said you understand it, that's mean you are in

charge, you have to tell me whether you get something you understand something or you need more explanations of something. 19:01

O. so you seek for feedback from your students about your teaching? 18:56

M. yes,

O. Ok I got your point. 18:54

O. Regarding CA records, the informal ones, do you think they are necessary for following-up the process of assessing students? Do you think it is necessary to be with you in the class and to use them during the lesson? 18:21

M. Do you mean the formal one, the records with marks? 18:16

O. No, I mean the informal ones, the ones that can be used to make some comments about your students' progress during the lesson. 18:08

M. Yes, I think they are very important, you know sometimes you can find what kind of interest the students have, and also you might find problems with students as individual, so if you collect information about one individual student in the class, for example, he is good in speaking, you can use this student as a model when you have a lesson about speaking or in presentations, so you can ask him or you can ask him to take the role of the teacher. You can make good use of such students. Such information you collect about students gives you an overall idea about students' progress, what kind of improvement they are having, and then you can help them according to their strengths or weaknesses. 16:55

O. so you can diagnose, for example, their weaknesses and their strengths and the use of these records helps you having clear idea about each student in the class? 16:40

M. yeah, it helps you, it's like a CV about the students, when you have an overall idea about the student, you understand him, even the question you ask him will be different, so you will be able to provide feedback to him according to his actual level. This is the idea, because we have individuals, and therefore we need to identify different points (levels) in their weaknesses. 16:04

O. As you know there are different types of assessment techniques, what type of assessment techniques do you prefer to use for the purpose of assessing your students? You talked about observations and self-assessment, what else do you use to assess your students? 15:30

M. even the self-assessment by the students themselves sometimes they will say it's good, even though, for example, in the speaking, sometimes I ask them, how was the presentation? Do you understand it? What kind of information did you learn from it? It is like a self-evaluation, you ask the student himself, how do you find your presentation? Was it good? Did you prepare well for it? Do you think you can do it in a better way? It's about self-evaluation and sometimes peer evaluation, sometimes I ask students to evaluate each other. 14:48

O. do you use other techniques, other than self-assessment, I think you told me the other day about using questionnaires and you talked about day to day observation? But I am talking about other techniques you apply in your classes to assess students. 14:14

M. Yes, sometimes we have peer visits from other teachers and they tell us some kind of students' weaknesses, also, the head teacher and his deputy they sometimes come and see something that you don't normally see about the students, maybe the students are not focusing or still they have some kind of problems, they usually tell us about such problems and we usually think about them and we write them down and we try to solve them. 13:30

O. Do you mean you ask for other opinions or for second opinions from other teachers? 13:32

M. yeah, yeah

O. Do you discuss this with that teacher? 13:15

M. Yeah, because actually sometimes when I ask my colleagues to visit me in my lesson, I tell them not to come for general visit, for example, I ask them to focus on problems such as class management, timing or in something. Sometimes I ask them to focus on students, what can you see, what can you notice, so it will be a direct visit, sometimes general and sometimes a direct visit. 12:50

O. One last question about the questionnaire, you strongly agreed with the statement about providing regular feedback to parents on their children's progress, why do you think this is very important? 12:31

M. Both school and family make an important contribution to the educational process, if we are doing our best here and we are following up the students here and when they go to the house they don't find the same follow-up, maybe we will not reach a good point in students' learning. There will be a gap. Last year we had a diagnostic exam for students and when we sent letters to parents informing them about their students' performance, the good points, and the bad points, unfortunately, only 5 or less than 10 fathers came to school to discuss their children's results with us. 11:34

O. One more question about the last period I observed, you chose two students to act the dialogue, did you select them deliberately for the purpose of assessing them? 10:56

M. They volunteered actually, I think they volunteered, maybe I chose one of them directly, but the other one volunteered. 10:44

O. Did you have any assessment purpose for choosing that particular student? 10:40

M. Firstly, I wanted to know if he is following us or not and if he can read well or not. This was the idea. 10:31

O. For that particular student, the one you chose deliberately, did you have in your CA register that you need to know more information about that student? 10:18

M. No, actually. 10:17

O. Also, I observed you helping students with pronunciation, was there any assessment purpose behind that? 10:02

M. Most of the time they face problems with pronunciation, so I just wanted them to carry on and read the dialogue quickly, that is way I helped them. 9:46



O. You talked about diagnostic exams which you conducted last year, so do you use CA assessment for such diagnostic purposes, I mean, as we discussed before, to identify students weakness or strengths? Do you follow up this furthermore and try to identify areas where you can provide help to students or give extra activities for outstanding students? 9:07

M. We have two plans for those students and we follow them: for slow learners, we give them remedial plans and for the outstanding students we have special activities for them. For the outstanding students we have a list of them and we make them the leaders of groups during the group work to provide help to other students. We also ask them to prepare for the English programmes. We also take those students who have problems in reading, speaking and engage them in these English programmes to read simple things like wisdoms, sentences and something like this. 8:08

O. So according to the diagnostic assessment results you set those programmes in the school to involve both weak and outstanding students? 7:56

M. Yes, yes, we do these programmes for both weak and outstanding students, yeah. 7:54

O. you told me on Sunday about lesson adaptation, do you do this lesson adaptation according to the assessment information you collect about your students' learning in the classroom? 7:31

M. Firstly, it's a change for routine. Secondly, you need students to focus more; sometimes the course book contains lots of things that are recycled and not important so you have to adapt the lesson or the task into a way that direct the students into something that you want them to do. 7:02

O. but from where do you get these information? 6:57

M. Through my teaching, after noticing the kind of teaching that I do during the day, I found that I need to do kind of adaptation for the lesson to the tasks. 6:45

O. Ok, you change your way of teaching for example, 6:42

M. Sometime I decide to teach them in the Learning Recourses Centre and sometimes we take them to the Active Class where we use the active board.. 60:30

O. so you set up some programmes or some techniques according to the needs of the students? 6:21

M. Yeah, yeah,

O. and according to the CA information you collect from the class? 6:18

M. Yeah, yeah, we sometimes give them videos; sometimes we have real pictures that we can show in the active board. It is a kind of adaptation for the lesson rather than the book itself. Sometimes we don't take the book to the LRC (Learning Recourses Centre) and to the Active Class, I only ask them to take the exercise book. 5:49

O. In your opinion, do think using this system of CA which includes continuous follow-up of students' progress is useful, effective? 5:39

M. It's very useful actually, but I have some comments about the marking system because for example in speaking they gave 15 marks. I think it is not ethical. 5:20

O. not ethical or not enough? 5:17

M. Not ethical, I mean it should be less than 15 marks. To be ethical it should be less than 15 marks because teacher can give them a mark that they don't deserve and we end up by cheating the students. 4:54

O. so you think this ethical thing is related to teachers themselves. 4:46

M. yes, to teachers because they are given the chance because they are given 15 marks, so if you give us 15 marks and we know it is Grade 10, students need even 1 mark, it is useful for them. So it should be less and we can divide the other marks into other skills or we can add other things to be assessed. 4:17

O. but, you know if teachers are honest enough, they will assess students according to their performance and their continuous progress, in that sense, do you think CA will be effective? 4:02

M. of course, I still say it is very effective but I only have one, simple comment about it. Once the teacher understands the assessment rules and why do we need the assessment and he understands this is the learner-centered and the need of assessment to be within the teaching and to involve students and families (in CA). If all these things come together in developing students' ability it will be very useful and the teacher will use it (CA) in a very positive way. But, on the other hand, if the teacher understands it (CA) as it is only papers and you have to provide evidence, it will be a problem because we are cheating ourselves first, and we are also cheating the students. 3:13

O. OK. Well, before we finish this interview, would you like to add anything in relation to what we have been talking about? Or you want to elaborate more on something you weren't given enough opportunity to talk about? 2:52

No, actually, I just want to talk about self-assessment and for this assessment, the idea of adaptation, because especially with generation now we have difficulties in teaching them without adaptation and if we don't adapt the lesson and if don't try to prepare the lesson in another way, we end up with students that have difficulties in English and in the different skills of English. Therefore, teachers should be engaged or involved in many courses of adaptation because one can teach the lesson differently and the other one maybe will teach but it will not be that good. So, if I am a student and another teacher is teaching me in a good way and I see that he's trying to develop his teaching, trying to do adaptation, changes the curriculum into the way that I can easily understand him, teaching will be very interesting for me. But, on the other hand if the teacher is only following teacher's book and he's trying to adapt his teaching and change his way of teaching, even though he's teaching the same class he's not ethical in giving the marks, we will have a bad idea about that teacher and it might be ended by students disrespect that teacher. 1:09

O. Thank you so much Muhanad for all the information you have provided and I really appreciate your cooperation with me regarding the interviews I conducted with you and regarding the observations of your classrooms and for all help and support all during my visits to your school. 0:42

Also I want to certify that all the information you provided to me, will be confidential nobody else will get access to them except my supervisors, they might need to read the transcripts. 0:24

M. Thank you Mr. Omar it was great to meet you again and Insha'Allah it will be help for you in your study. 0:14

## APPENDIX 5: NVIVO THEMATIC CODING

(Page1)

**Nodes**

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
<input type="radio"/> Assessment practices (Nodes)	7	11	24/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 13:07	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Percentage of CA	1	1	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Final exams & tests	10	19	24/06/2012 12:55	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 09:55	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Beliefs about CA	11	46	24/06/2012 12:59	4FPHCINE	02/07/2012 11:32	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Teachers Background	1	1	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Formal & Informal assessment	2	2	26/06/2012 14:44	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 15:10	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Get support from colleagues	4	4	27/06/2012 12:42	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:29	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Factors affecting use of CA	11	56	24/06/2012 13:22	4FPHCINE	30/06/2012 20:54	OMAR

### Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
<input type="radio"/> Assessment practices (Nodes)	7	11	24/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 13:07	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Task-based assessment	4	4	26/06/2012 14:18	4FPHCINE	02/07/2012 11:32	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Group work	6	11	24/06/2012 12:17	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 15:22	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Self-assessment	7	9	24/06/2012 13:04	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:27	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Portfolios	3	9	24/06/2012 13:20	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 12:28	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Homework	2	4	25/06/2012 14:59	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 10:54	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Open discussion	2	2	25/06/2012 15:00	4FPHCINE	25/06/2012 15:23	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Reading aloud	1	1	26/06/2012 13:42	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 13:42	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Quizzes	1	3	26/06/2012 15:03	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 16:19	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Peer evaluation	4	6	24/06/2012 13:43	4FPHCINE	02/07/2012 11:31	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Oral questioning	4	5	24/06/2012 14:10	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 13:36	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Projects	1	1	25/06/2012 09:56	4FPHCINE	25/06/2012 09:56	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Continuous Observation	6	15	25/06/2012 10:00	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 12:15	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> giving feedback	8	14	24/06/2012 13:40	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:35	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Assessing participation	7	11	24/06/2012 11:17	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:34	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Advanced help Slow	4	5	25/06/2012 14:58	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 15:22	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Assess Specific Skills	3	4	28/06/2012 13:08	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 15:44	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Collect information & recording	9	31	24/06/2012 11:20	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:34	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Following up improvement	3	6	26/06/2012 13:44	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:38	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Informing Learners about the criteria	3	5	26/06/2012 16:02	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 16:02	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Testing	2	3	25/06/2012 11:43	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 16:19	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Lesson adaptation	4	7	25/06/2012 09:53	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 13:36	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Uses of Assessment	5	8	24/06/2012 11:49	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 10:28	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> giving feedback to parents	7	9	25/06/2012 10:05	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:31	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Planning for assessment	9	15	24/06/2012 11:19	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 15:13	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Remedial plans	8	20	24/06/2012 11:22	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:39	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Rewarding learners	3	3	25/06/2012 14:06	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:40	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Percentage of CA	1	1	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE

(Page3)

### Nodes

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
<input type="radio"/> Final exams & tests	10	19	24/06/2012 12:55	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 09:55	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Beliefs about CA	11	46	24/06/2012 12:59	4FPHCINE	02/07/2012 11:32	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Assessment informs teaching	9	16	24/06/2012 11:40	4FPHCINE	30/06/2012 20:42	OMAR
<input type="radio"/> CA motivates learners	4	5	25/06/2012 16:05	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 12:15	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Discover learning needs	2	2	25/06/2012 12:31	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 14:07	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Effectiveness of CA	4	7	25/06/2012 13:55	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 15:53	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Teachers' understanding of Assessment	9	34	24/06/2012 11:59	4FPHCINE	01/07/2012 20:14	OMAR
<input type="radio"/> Purposes of assessment	6	16	24/06/2012 11:48	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 11:19	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Diagnostic Assessment	8	17	24/06/2012 12:13	4FPHCINE	30/06/2012 20:45	OMAR
<input type="radio"/> Grading	2	3	27/06/2012 10:49	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:43	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> continuous assessment	6	8	04/07/2012 15:44	4FPHCINE	04/07/2012 16:34	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Teachers Background	1	1	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Formal & Informal assessment	2	2	26/06/2012 14:44	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 15:10	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Get support from colleagues	4	4	27/06/2012 12:42	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:29	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Factors affecting use of CA	11	56	24/06/2012 13:22	4FPHCINE	30/06/2012 20:54	OMAR
<input type="radio"/> Difficulty in assessing speaking	3	3	26/06/2012 14:49	4FPHCINE	02/07/2012 11:51	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Assessment document	3	4	26/06/2012 15:58	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 13:17	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Supervisors	4	11	26/06/2012 16:00	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 16:27	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Training for teachers	3	5	27/06/2012 12:43	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 16:27	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Final exams & tests	10	19	28/06/2012 13:21	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 09:55	4FPHCINE
<input type="radio"/> Low level of learners	3	5	26/06/2012 13:57	4FPHCINE	27/06/2012 16:10	4FPHCINE

## APPENDIX 6: AN EXAMPLE OF THEMATIC CODING FROM NVIVO

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. At the top, the window title is "Teachers' beliefs about CA in the Sultanate of Oman (NVivo 10).mvp - NVivo". The main window is divided into several sections:

- Nodes List:** A table listing various nodes with their respective source counts, reference counts, creation dates, and users.
- Node Selection:** The node "beliefs about CA" is selected, and its details are shown in the main pane.
- Reference Details:** The main pane shows a list of references for the selected node, including source names, reference counts, and coverage percentages.
- Text Excerpts:** The main pane displays text excerpts from the selected references, such as "M. Sometimes I feel that there is a big gap between what they say and what the students should be assessed on..." and "S. I think the assessment that we can do inside the classroom, the oral discussion between me and the students is one assessment so I can know that students understood what we talked about..."

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Assessment practices (Nodes)	7	11	24/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 13:07	4FPHCINE
Percentage of CA	1	1	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE	24/06/2012 12:51	4FPHCINE
Final exams & tests	10	19	24/06/2012 12:55	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 09:55	4FPHCINE
beliefs about CA	10	36	24/06/2012 12:59	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:48	4FPHCINE
Teachers Background	1	1	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE	25/06/2012 12:11	4FPHCINE
Formal & informal assessment	2	2	26/06/2012 14:44	4FPHCINE	26/06/2012 15:10	4FPHCINE
Get support from colleagues	4	4	27/06/2012 12:42	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:29	4FPHCINE
Factors affecting use of CA	11	52	24/06/2012 13:22	4FPHCINE	28/06/2012 10:45	4FPHCINE

beliefs about CA

<Internals\Interview 1\_transcript MDH> - § 1 reference coded [3.21% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.21% Coverage

M. Sometimes I feel that there is a big gap between what they say and what the students should be assessed on. For example, they said to you that you should use the cassette player and in the final exam we are asked to read the transcript. The final exam is different from what you did all the year. If you stick to the curriculum and stick to their instructions, your students will fail. There is no relation between what you do and the final exam. Last year we did our exams ourselves, this year they (policy makers) decided to get our exams from the ministry, so it is a problem, they designed the final exams not related to what we did all the year, so this make you confused between what you should do and what you want to do.

<Internals\Interview 1\_transcript SGH> - § 6 references coded [29.65% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.77% Coverage

S. I think the assessment that we can do inside the classroom, the oral discussion between me and the students is one assessment so I can know that students understood what we talked about. This when way, and the task and activities that are included in the class book and the skills book. Sometimes, not all the time, we can bring some tasks from outside the course.

Reference 2 - 9.06% Coverage

O. OK, also, in your opinion, why it is important for assessment to take place continuously throughout the year? Not just to assess students but the end of the year for example to know...

## APPENDIX 7: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

### **University of Leeds, School of Education – Participant Information Sheet for the observations and interviews**

**Research project** – Investigating English teachers’ beliefs and practices in relation to the Continuous Assessment reform in the Sultanate of Oman

We wish to invite you to take part in this research project. Please take time to read the following information to help you decide if you wish to take part. If you have any questions, please get in touch.

#### **What is the purpose of the research?**

The purposes of the project are

To investigate the beliefs of English teachers about the purpose, use, and effectiveness of continuous assessment.

To identify teachers' actual continuous assessment practices.

To identify the challenges that influence teachers' implementation of continuous assessment.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

You have been chosen because you are teaching English in the educational system of the Sultanate of Oman which requires teachers of English to use continuous assessment when assessing their learners.

#### **What will happen if I agree to take part?**

If you agree to take part, I will ask you for permission to carry out the research in your classroom through observations. You will also be interviewed immediately after every classroom observation. You will be invited to schedule some meetings with me to make sure you get adequate information about my research; what I am doing in your classroom and what is involved on your part.



**Will I be recorded, and how will the recordings be used?**

With your permission, I will video your lesson during observation and I will also use an observation schedule to take notes about your assessment practices in the classroom. I will show you the observation schedule immediately after the observation. I will also record the interview so that I have a good record of what you have said. I will be the only person to listen to the recording and to watch the video of the lesson, and I will transcribe them so my supervisors can read it shall they need to. I will change all the names so that no-one else will be able to identify you or your school. Before I share the transcripts, I will check with you that you are happy for me to do this. If there are any things you are not happy about, I will not share them. After I have finished doing the research, the recordings will be kept safely in a file at the university.

During the recording process, if you would like to say something that you don't feel comfortable for me to record, please signal and I will switch off the video camera or the recorder and switch it back on again later when you think it is fine to continue recording.

Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary and that you are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. Also, should you not wish to answer any particular question or questions, you are free to decline.

**Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is being organised by myself, Omar Al Sawafi, under the supervision of Prof. Simon Borg and Dr Martin Lamb in the School of Education at University of Leeds and is self-funded.

If you wish to speak to me, please reply by email or phone me. Here are my phone number and e-mail:

E-mail: [edu1mosm@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:edu1mosm@leeds.ac.uk)

Mobile: 92971717

Thank you very much for reading this information sheet. We hope that you will enjoy taking part in this study, and thank you.

## APPENDIX 8: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research:**

**Investigating English teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the Continuous Assessment reform in the Sultanate of Oman**

**Name of Researcher:** Omar Al Sawafi

Tick the box if you agree with the statement

1. I confirm that I have been given an overview about the above research and I understand the information explaining it and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
2. I understand that my participation is purely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question or questions, I am free to decline.
3. I give permission for the researcher to have access to my responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.
4. I agree for the data collected from me to be used in future research.

If you are willing to participate in the research, please sign the form below.

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Researcher	Date	Signature

## APPENDIX 9: PERMISSION FROM THE MOE TO CONDUCT THE STUDY IN DHAHIRA SCHOOLS

Page 1 of 1

من:

الاسم: المكتب الفني للدراسات والتطوير

تاريخ الإرسال: AM ١٠:٣١:٢٩ ٢٠١١/٠٩/١٩

إلى: م. ع. للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة الظاهرة

نسخة للاطلاع إلى: حفصة بنت سيف بن حمدان السبتية

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحث

الملفات الملحقة:

استبانة عمر الصوافي . docx

بطاقة ملاحظة لدراسة عمر الصوافي . docx

المرسل: بشرى بنت بدر بن ناصر الدوحاني

محتوى المراسلة:

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد،،،

الموضوع: تسهيل مهمة باحث

أود إفادتكم بأن الفاضل/ عمر بن سعيد بن محمد الصوافي طالب دراسات عليا بجامعة ليدز بالمملكة المتحدة؛ للحصول على درجة الدكتوراه في التربية، ويقوم حالياً بإجراء دراسة تتناول معتقدات معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية حول التقييم المستمر وعلاقته بممارساتهم في استخدام التقييم المستمر في العملية التعليمية. ويرغب الباحث في تطبيق أدوات الدراسة على عينة من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية بمدرينتكم علماً بأنه سيقوم بتطبيق الدراسة الاستطلاعية في شهري سبتمبر وأكتوبر ٢٠١١، وسيكون التطبيق النهائي خلال شهري فبراير ومارس ٢٠١٢ . .

وعليه يرجى التكرم بتسهيل مهمة الباحث في تطبيق أدوات دراسته حسب الإجراءات المتبعة لديكم.

شاكرين ومقدرين تعاونكم ،،،،،

## APPENDIX 10: AREA FACULTY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE ETHICAL OPINION

Performance, Governance and Operations  
Research & Innovation Services  
Charles Thackrah Building  
101 Clarendon Road  
Leeds LS2 9LJ Tel: 0113 343 4873  
Email: [j.m.blaikie@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:j.m.blaikie@leeds.ac.uk)



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

Omar Al-Sawafi  
School of Education  
University of Leeds  
Leeds, LS2 9JT

**AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
University of Leeds**

9 December 2011

Dear Omar

**Title of study:** Investigating English teachers' beliefs and practices in relation to the Continuous Assessment reform in the Sultanate of Oman

**Ethics reference:** AREA 11-089

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the ESSL, Environment and LUBS (AREA) Faculty Research Ethics Committee and I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

<i>Document</i>	<i>Version</i>	<i>Date</i>
AREA 11-089 Omar Al-Sawafi Ethical_Review_Form_V3.doc	2	23/11/11

The committee made the following comments:

1. The impression is given that Omar's is employed by the Ministry of Education (from the e-mail address given on the information sheets). If this is the case, participants should be made aware of this.
2. Appendices A & B: Please use your University of Leeds e-mail address as the contact email address.
3. C21: A longer period would be preferable to allow time to do any required amendments post-viva and publish the findings.

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the original research as submitted at date of this approval. This includes recruitment methodology and all changes must be ethically approved prior to implementation.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation, as well as documents such as sample consent forms, and other

documents relating to the study. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie

Senior Research Ethics Administrator, Research & Innovation Services

On behalf of Dr Anthea Hucklesby

Chair, AREA Faculty Research Ethics Committee

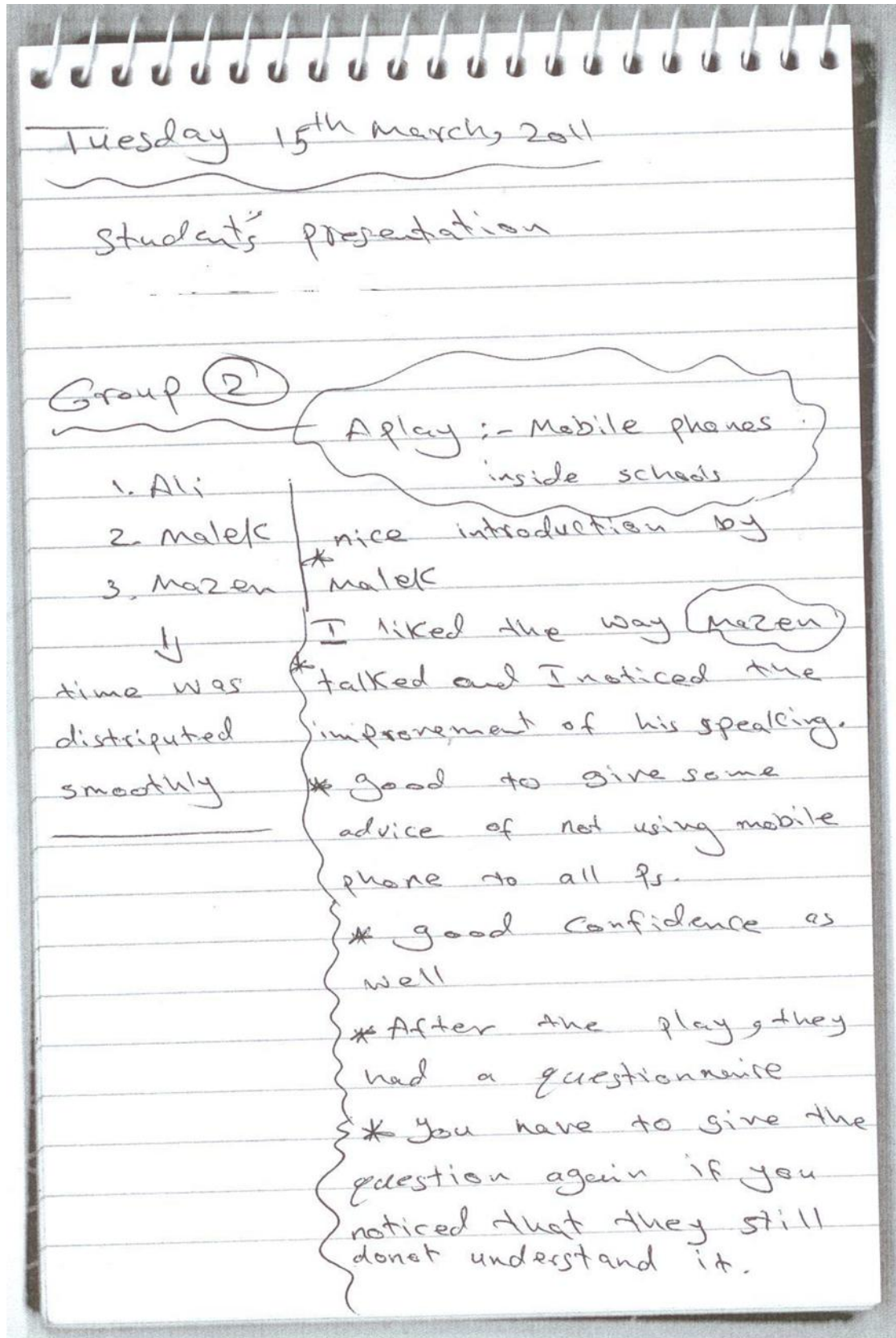
CC: Student's supervisor(s)

**APPENDIX 11: CA SUMMARY SHEET OF SEMESTER ONE  
(MUHANAD)**

MARKS << CONTIN. ASSESSMENT		GRADE 'A' / 'B'		SEMESTER ONE		Class: _____ Year: _____		Teacher: _____															
Can read independently. RDG: Total (5)	Can give presentations. (5)	Can interact with others. (10)	SPK: Total (15)	Can write texts with the purpose of providing information. (5)	Can write and respond to letters/ e-mails. (5)	WRT: Total (10)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	
							5	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: Total (30)							24	24	28	24	25	24	29	25	25	30	25	26	25	30	27	28	

①

**APPENDIX 12: MUHANAD'S ASSESSMENT NOTES ABOUT PRESENTATIONS**



### APPENDIX 13: MUHANAD'S CHECKLISTS FOR AWARDING MARKS FOR PRESENTATIONS

#### CHECKLIST:1

20/11/2011

Sultanate of Oman

A'Dhara Region

██████████ School (5-12)

Grade

Student's Name : ██████████

Student's Number: .(19).

#### Continuous Assessment

**\*\* Criteria for evaluating speaking \*\***

**\*one way ( Public Speaking )**

(1) Excellent (2) very good (3) Good (4) Satisfactory (5) needs support

Element Learning Outcome	1	2	3	4	5
Pronounces individual sounds /words appropriately & correctly		/			
Forms/ links words/phrases/ clauses/ sentences correctly & accurately		/			
Organizes ideas and information		/			
Exchange information and social language appropriately		/			
Take part in interactions/communications with others(1way-2way-public speaking)					
Describe situations/people /places /things appropriately		/			
Personality & confidence		/			

4/5 B+ very good

\* Spain  
 Official name: Kingdom of Spain  
 Location: western Europe  
 Capital: Madrid  
 Population: 42.7 million  
 Area: 504,782 km<sup>2</sup>  
 Language: Spanish  
 Currency: Euro



CHECKLIST:2

Tourism in Oman

11/12/2011

Sultanate of Oman  
A'Dhara Region

[Redacted] School (5-12)

Grade

Student's Name : [Redacted] ..... Student's Number: 19.....

Continuous Assessment

\*\* Criteria for evaluating speaking \*\*

\*2way (info-exchange)

(1) Excellent (2) very good (3) Good (4) Satisfactory (5) needs support

Element Learning Outcome	1	2	3	4	5
Pronounces individual sounds /words appropriately & correctly		/			
Forms/ links words/phrases/ clauses/ sentences correctly & accurately		/			
Organizes ideas and information		/			
Exchange information and social language appropriately		/			
Take part in interactions/communications with others(1way-2way-public speaking)		/			
Describe situations/people /places /things appropriately		/			
Personality & confidence		/			

- 1- cakes of Oman - 44
- 2- The <sup>AFAIAJ</sup> Forts in Oman - 50
- 3- The Desert in Oman - 68
- 4- The wild life in Oman.

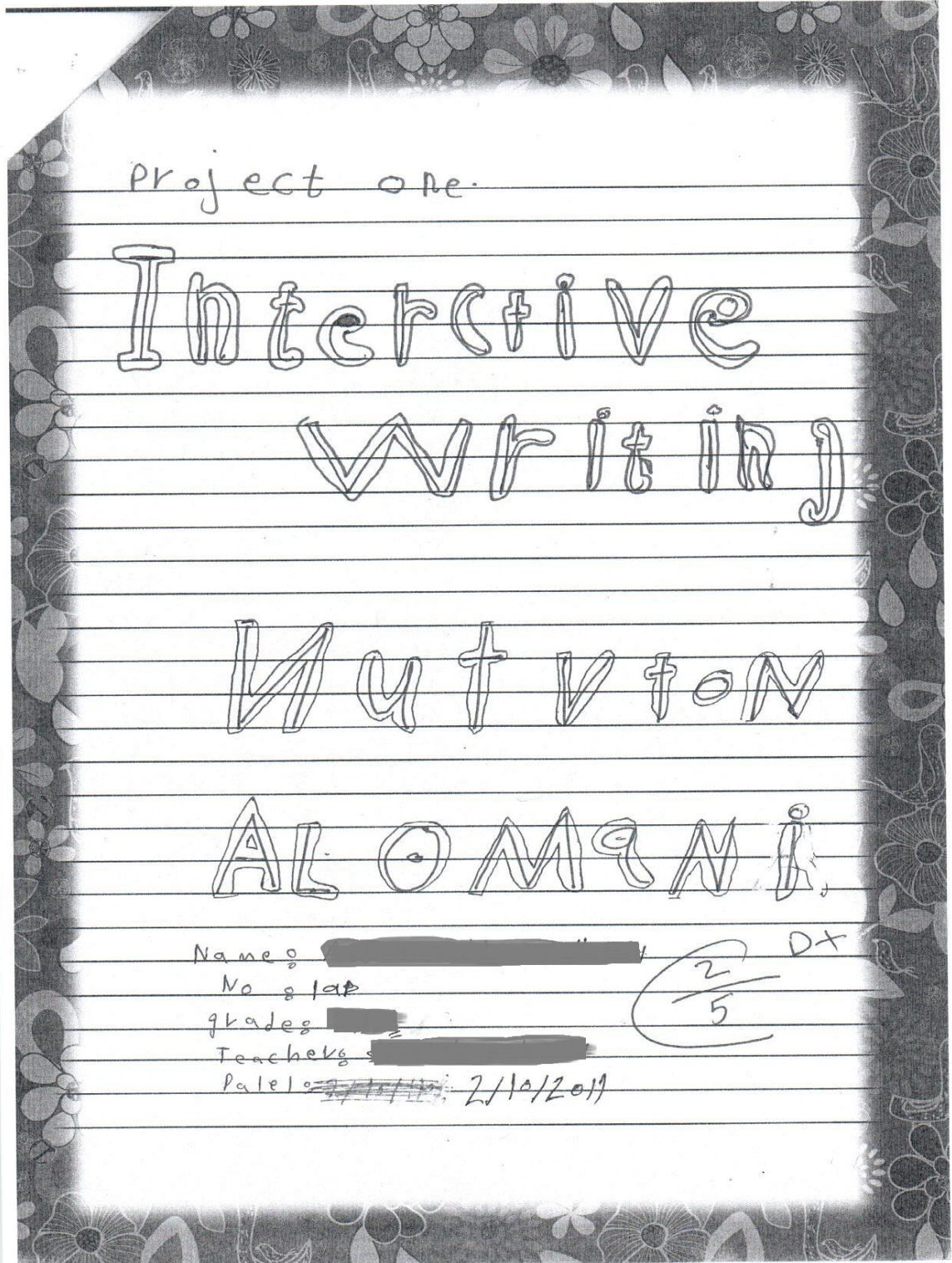
9/10

B+ very good

\* Date:- Sunday 11th Dec 2011  
Place of presenting:- The Active class

**APPENDIX 14: INTERACTIVE WRITING (MUHANAD)**

(Cover page)



Project one.

Interactive  
Writing

Mutvton

AL OMANI

Name: [Redacted]

No of lap

grades [Redacted]

Teacher's [Redacted]

Date: ~~2/10/2019~~ 2/10/2019

$\frac{2}{5}$  D+

(Interactive writing)

Dear Divad

Hello Divad

I'm Abdullah Zaid Al-Hafmi  
I'm student in Abdullah bin Omar  
oman is a very interesting country  
It's beautiful old buildings and forts  
and castles The people are very  
friendly Muscat the capital city

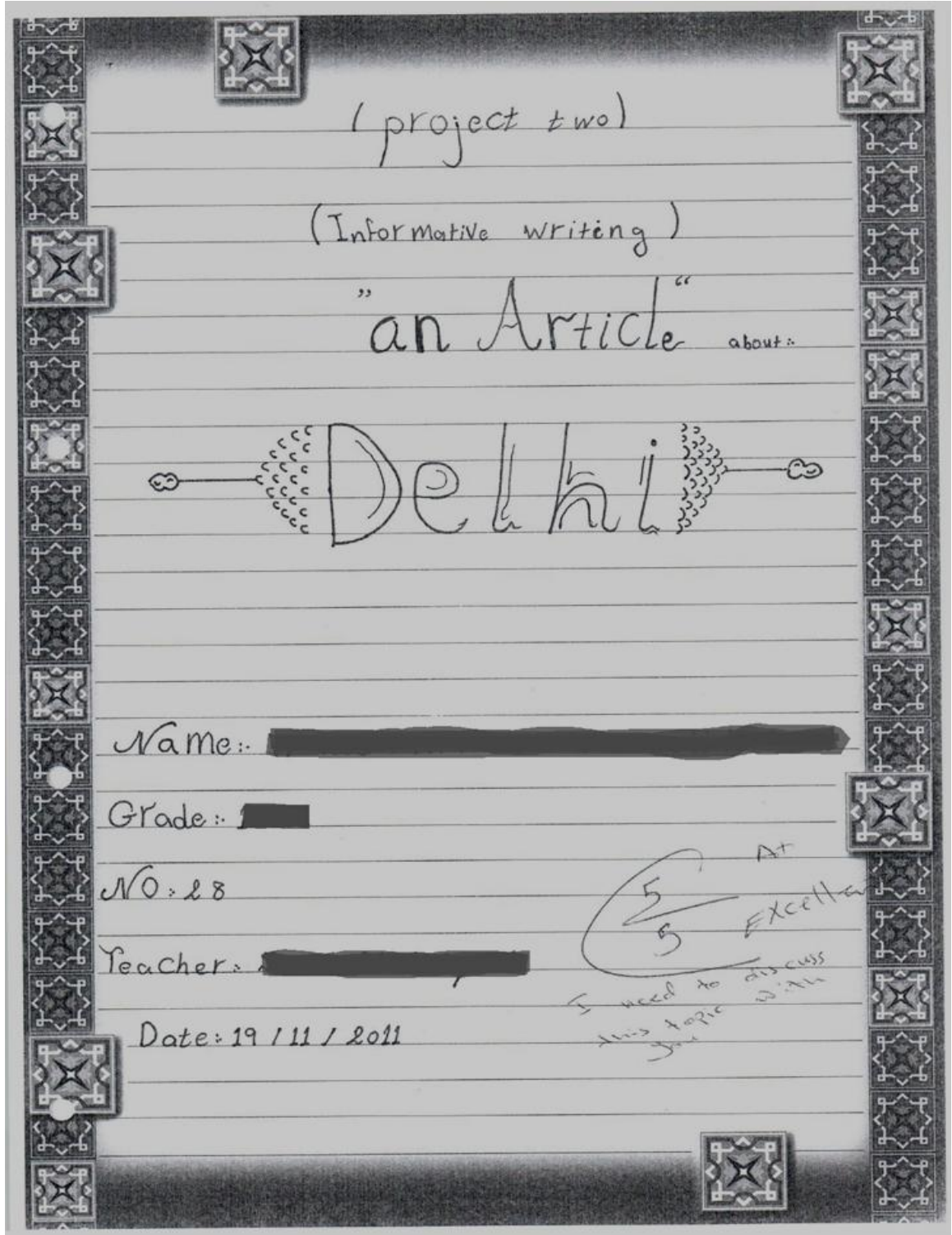
Hi

site At omak is one of the countries of the  
world blessed with unique and diverse  
life The vast and fertile including the  
sub-tropical coastal vegetation  
to sustain some fauna oman is the  
habitat for thousands of gazelles ibex  
Arabian leopard and Arabian  
oryx The sultanate has exerted great  
efforts in successfully reintroducing  
subspecies

good bye

**APPENDIX 15: INFORMATIVE WRITING (MUHANAD)**

(Cover page)



(Formative writing)

Delhi, the capital of India, presents a vast panorama of fascinating images. It is a city where forts, tombs and ruins share the skyline with the high-rise buildings and stately homes. The wide tree-lined avenues of New Delhi give way to the crowded narrow lanes of Old Delhi, and along with this change comes a diametrically different culture and lifestyle. The presence of contrasts is a historical legacy of the city.

Delhi is a metropolitan city in the true sense of the word. It has, for centuries, attracted rulers, invaders, businessmen, builders, poets, painters and intellectuals from many parts of the world. Today's Delhi encloses many older cities, its stone walls have seen many empires rise and fall.

Modern India's history is synonymous with Delhi. It was from the ramparts of its Red Fort that India's first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, unfurled the national flag on August 15, 1947, signifying the end of British rule.

Today, as India's capital and the seat of its parliament, the city hosts world leaders, diplomats, international missions, sports meets, cultural festivals and conferences.

Delhi, a major point of entry for foreign travellers to India, boasts of a tourism infrastructure which compares with the best in the world... International hotels with extensive facilities, gourmet restaurants, air-conditioned limousines, bargain shopping and convenient connections by rail and air. Delhi has everything going, and is the ultimate travel experience.

**APPENDIX 16: ALZAHRA'S CA RECORD SHEET**

Grade      (Basic ) ----- Continuous Assessment

class: 1

Year: 2011/2012

Semester: TWO

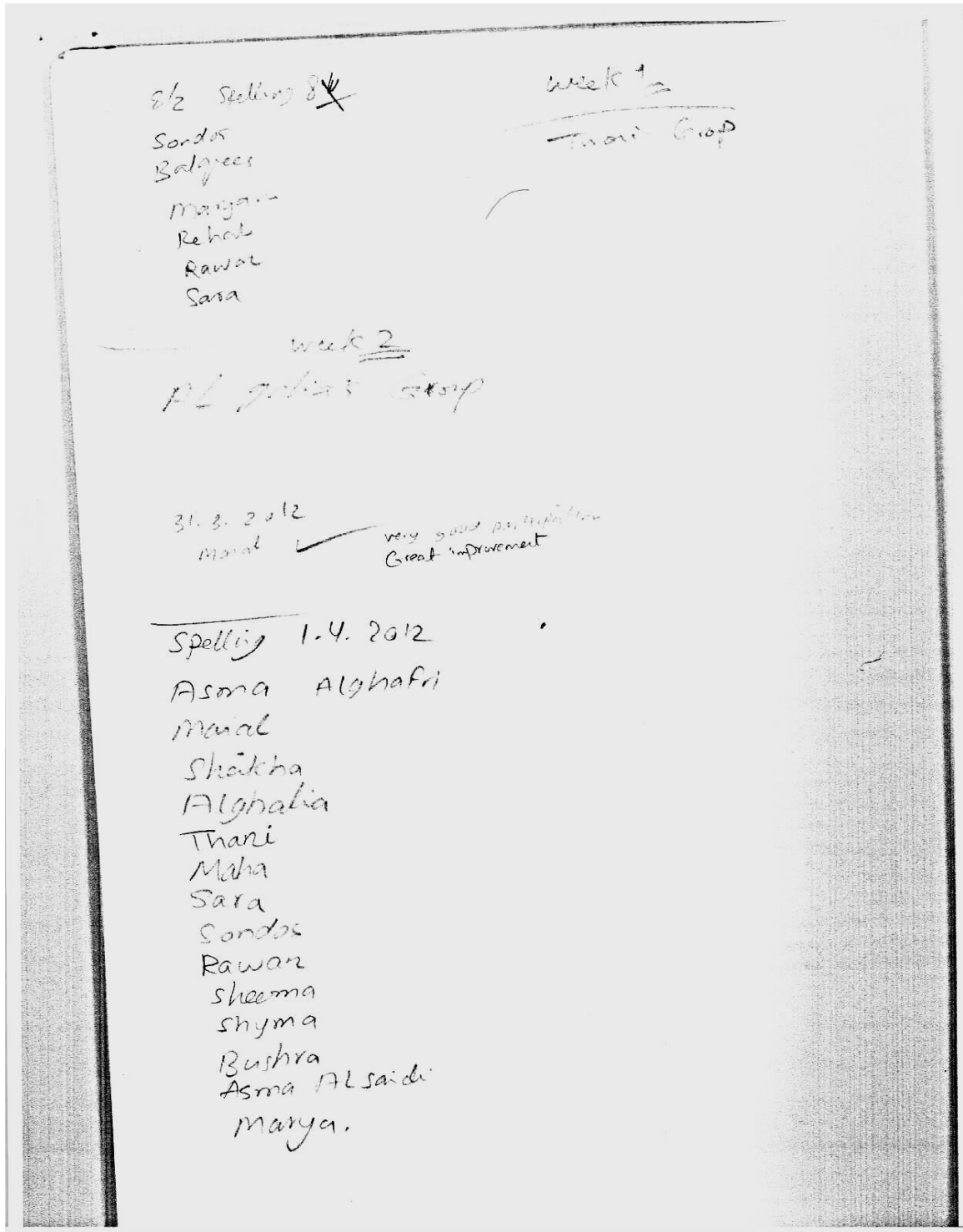
Teacher:                     

No	Name	Speaking			Reading			Writing			Total	CT					C. A	ST	
		Pres	Inter	Total	UDWT	RI	Total	Narr	Eval	Total		GR/VC	Listening	Reading	Gram/Voc	Writing			CT Total
		5	10	15	5	5	10	5	5	10		5	5	5	5	5			20
1						5		5											
2						5		5											
3								5											
4								1											
5								1											
6						4		1											
7						5		5											
8						3		5											
9						4		5											
10						5		5											
11						4		5											
12								1											
13						5		5											
14								1											
15						5		1											
16								1											
17						5		5											
18								1											
19								1											
20						5		5											
21						4		4											
22						3		1											
23						5		1											
24								1											
25						5		5											
26																			
27																			
28																			
29																			
30																			
31																			
32																			

Pres	can give presentation	Narr	Can write stories and narrate events in the past
Inter	Can interact with others	Eval	Can write texts which express and justify their opinions
UDWT	understand different types of written texts	GR/VC	understand and use grammar and vocabulary
RI	can Read independently		

## APPENDIX 17: ALZAHRA'S NOTES ABOUT LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE

(Page 1)



Week 1

Aseel's group

week 2

Atheer's group

week 3

Ashfa

Fadwa  
Maha  
Ameer Musabeh  
Ameera  
Asma Ali  
shorog Said  
Atheer mala

spelling 2

- shorog
- Atheer Mansa
- Ashwaq
- Atheer Musabeh
- Aseel

Ashfa +S  
shorog +S