PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF PORTFOLIO SELF-ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN AN INTERMEDIATE EFL CLASSROOM, SAUDI ARABIA

DISSERTATION

Presented In Partial Fulfillment of the Required for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in The Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory qualitative case study examines the introduction of the self-assessment portfolio as a method of assessment in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The purpose of the study was to examine EFL students’, EFL teachers’, and school administrators’ reactions to the use of a non-indigenous (Westernized) assessment methodology (i.e., the self-assessment portfolio).

The investigation employed qualitative research techniques. Data included the following: (1) EFL students’ self-assessment portfolios; (2) interviews with EFL students; (3) interviews with EFL teachers; (4) interviews with Saudi school administrators; and (5) the researcher’s observations and field notes. Eighty-one students were involved in the study. Forty-three students submitted self-assessment portfolios.

Data analysis revealed that most students enjoyed using the self-assessment portfolio. Most students found the
process of reflecting on one’s own learning to be helpful. Moreover, a number of students who did not submit portfolios indicated in interviews that they thought this self-assessment approach would be helpful in identifying strengths and weakness in their learning. Interviews of two EFL teachers and three school administrators revealed that these individuals endorse the self-assessment portfolio as a type of assessment worthy of future consideration. Both portfolio and interview data suggested that the self-assessment method encourages students to adopt patterns of critical thinking and motivates students to learn.

The study includes a brief analysis of Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School’s existing EFL curriculum and offers a framework for future implementation of the self-assessment portfolio within Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Province. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the introduction of Westernized educational approaches from the perspective of the researcher, who is a Saudi native. It is suggested that any introduction of non-indigenous educational methods would first require that such methods be modified and adapted to conform to the values of Islam.
Dedicated to my Dad and Mom

Dedicated to my dad who passed away after a long struggle with cancer in Saudi Arabia while completing the dissertation in the United States and my whole family members who supported my finishing of the dissertation. I think my dad, peace be upon his soul, dreamt of the day I graduate and return to Saudi. Dad, I was unable to see you before you passed away but I would like to dedicate this poem to you from the bottom of my heart.
TRANSLATION

Ooh eye cry tears of love so it extinguishes my flames,
So time could grieve my atrocious luck,
And so the grief could return my loved dad,
O merciful Allah you’re the only one I can bestow on,
Ooh Allah, you know my intentions and what’s in my out-crying heart,
And you sketched my path and my terrain,
I beg you Allah to have mercy upon a loved perished devoted dad,
Qasim Alabelwahab, a sickened father of cancer,
I beg you Allah to have mercy upon my saddened mother,
And strengthen my weary sister and all my relatives,
And repay with good deeds every mourning friend and stranger,
And quench pain fire during foreigner land and in my distressed chest,
O Allah I have no one left except you and you’re the only one who knows me,
And I beg you to send my message to my loved dad,
An apologetic message of Sorrow burning in my weakened bled heart,
A letter in it I say:
Oh father I ask you for forgiveness of every ignominy,
And for every moment I fell short in lending a hand to you,
And a promise I took to fulfill before I die,
That you are in all my invocations and prayers to the god.
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VITA

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FIELD OF STUDY

Major Fields: Education

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Conferences Presentation


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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, educators in the west have become more and more vocal in calling for alternatives to traditional student assessment practices. As Cheryl Polakowski, a kindergarten teacher from New Jersey, wrote in *Student Portfolios* (1993), “Some of us (are) no longer willing to assess youngsters on useless, predetermined matters, and in ways that have no application to how we (are) teaching in our classrooms” (pp. 6, 47).

Alternative assessment, write O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), offers an alternative to traditional, standardized forms of testing such as multiple-choice tests. The authors noted that alternative assessment is, by definition, criterion-referenced and is typically authentic because it is based on activities that represent classroom and real-life settings. O’Malley and Valdez Pierce used the term authentic to describe forms of assessment that are consistent with classroom goals, curricula, and instruction.
According to Student Portfolios, the context, purpose, audience, and constraints of authentic assessment must connect in some way to real situations and problems. The assessment could be in the form of a performance test, a set of observations, a set of open-ended questions, an exhibition, an interview, or a portfolio (p. 94).

Portfolios are at the forefront of alternative assessment approaches, notes Hamp-Lyons (1996). In Hancock (1994, p. 238), a portfolio is defined as the collection of a learner’s work assembled for the purpose of determining how much has been learned. Hancock wrote that the portfolio may include examples of the learner’s completion of tasks such as reports, (both oral and written), creative projects such as artwork, contributions to group projects, and student writing (e.g., essays, poems, and written homework). The items chosen for inclusion in the portfolio can be selected by the learner, the teacher, or both, depending on the instructor’s purposes.

In Student Portfolios, Dalheim described portfolios as longitudinal in nature, diverse in content, and collaborative in their selection and evaluation. Portfolios, Dalheim continued, emphasize strengths, development of
skills, and improvements, as well as personal reflections and expectations. Dalheim noted that teachers expect portfolios to provide a broad picture of a student’s achievement by showing the unfolding of skills over time something that a one-time performance on a test cannot do. Teachers also use portfolios to encourage students to take partial responsibility, for their own learning, through selection and reflection about portfolios.

According to Schrier and Hammadou (1994), portfolio assessment is becoming increasingly common in K-12 writing instruction, and it is particularly applicable to foreign-language assessment. Standardized tests, noted O’Malley and Chamot (1990), provide foreign-language teachers with partial picture of student achievement. Foreign language teachers use portfolios, on the other hand, to collect student writing samples, classroom tests, work in cooperative group projects, teacher observations, interviews, and think-aloud protocols (Cohen, 1990, 1998). The portfolios thus gives the teacher multiple samples of student achievement and also involves the student in developing foreign language learning autonomy through reflections as part of the portfolio.
By employing portfolio assessment in addition to standardized testing, foreign language teachers can better learn about their students’ strengths and weaknesses, wrote Shohamy (1994). Because assessment portfolios are focused, wrote O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), they can serve as vehicles for observing gradual change and also help foreign language teachers make professional judgments about individual students. O’Malley and Valdez Pierce added that the most important information a teacher can gather from portfolios is the extent to which students are benefiting from instruction, particularly if the teacher uses the acquired information to modify his/her instruction.

Student portfolios do not benefit only the foreign language teacher; they also benefit the foreign language learner. Sweet (1993) gives three reasons why the effective use of portfolios benefits students by involving students in their own learning: (a) portfolios engage students in meaningful activities that are likely to result in products worth sharing with others and retaining for review; (b) portfolios allow students to chronicle their own work and open new channels of communication with teachers that are focused on the students’ own classroom products; (c) and,
portfolios convey to students to learn the features of quality performance so that the students can apply the criteria to their own work and internalize them as continuous.

O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) wrote that a key element of portfolios is student self-assessment; without self-assessment and reflection on the part of the student, a portfolio is not really a portfolio but something else. According to O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, the self-assessment called for by portfolios has numerous outcomes for the student: students take responsibility for knowing where they are with regard to their learning goals; students broaden their view of what is being learned; and they begin to see learning as a continuous process. Perhaps even more important, students learn to become autonomous learners of the foreign language through skills learned in developing their language portfolios.

The use of portfolios, wrote Moore (1994), is based on several pedagogical principles, including the involvement of students in decision-making about what they learned and how they learn it. Moore also continued that portfolio assessment upholds Dewey’s principle of learning as self-
directed and also supports the Piagetian model for learning by allowing student work to be assessed in a cumulative way through the stages of learning.

The purpose of this case study was to advance knowledge about portfolio assessment by examining the attitudes of students and educators about the introduction of self-assessment portfolios into an English-as-a-foreign language class at the middle school level in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Before further discussing the purpose and structure of this study, the researcher has provided below an overview of Saudi Arabia and its educational system.

An Introduction to Saudi Arabia

A part of the Asian continent, Saudi Arabia is located in the middle of the Arabian Peninsula. (A map of Saudi Arabia can be found in Appendix K, p. 8 ) The 868,730 square miles of Saudi Arabia are inhabited by almost 20 million people, with 23 percent living in rural areas and 77 percent living in urban areas. Saudi Arabia is near Kuwait, Iraq, and Jordan on the north; the Persian Gulf, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates on the east; Oman and Yemen on the south; and the Red Sea on the west (Mansour, 1988).
The Saud family gained control of the area now known as Saudi Arabia around 1500; later in the same century, the Ottomans took control of the region. By 1891, the Ottomans were forced to relinquish power; and, in 1932, the area became known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (World Book Encyclopedia, 2000).

At one time, the country was divided into five major provinces: the Western, Central, Northern, Southern, and Eastern provinces. Saudi Arabia has now established 14 administrative regions: Al-Baha with the city of AlBaha as the capital; Al-Jouf with Sikaka as the capital; Asir with Abha as the capital; Eastern with Dammam as the capital; Hail with the city of Hail as the capital; Jizan with the city of Jizan as the capital: Madinah with the holy city of Madinah as the capital; Makkah with the holy city of Makkah as the capital; Najran with the city of Najran as the capital; Northern Border with the city of Ara’ar as the capital; Qasim with the city of Buraidah as the capital; Qirayyat with the city of Qirayyat as the capital; Riyadh with the city of Riyadh as the capital; and Tabouk with the city of Tabouk as the capital.
The Eastern Administrative Region, which includes a wide expanse of empty desert, is the largest of the regions and has a population of more than three million. This region holds important economic status because of its oil fields, seaports, and Jubail’s industrial city. The major cities in the Eastern Province are Al-Dhahran, Al-Hoffuf, Al-Khobar, and Al-Dammam. The people of the Eastern Province traditionally have lived by fishing, farming palm trees, and trading with India through sea voyages. This researcher is a native of the Eastern Province, and the case study for this project was conducted in the Eastern Province.

Prior to the 1938 discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia by five oil companies, including Chevron, Saudis typically were illiterate and lived in poverty (Mansour, 1988). Four decades after the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, the country had developed in numerous ways, including the provisions of public education opportunities, and it had become one of the richest and most industrial countries in the region.

Oil revenues have been used to establish schools in every region. With a strategy to improve education through a series of five-year plans, the country has worked to meet
the challenges of a developing country--minimizing illiteracy and encouraging citizens to obtain upper-level degrees in all fields (Mansour). According to Powel (1982), “Never in human history has an economic and political revolution taken place on the scale of the one that is currently taking place” in Saudi Arabia and other countries on the Persian Gulf (p.15).

Education in Saudi Arabia

After the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was established in 1932, informal schools, known as Al-Kuttab or Al-Katateeb, were popular educational settings for boys. Such schools focused on teaching students to read, write, and memorize the Holy Kura’an (Darweesh, 1988). This education did not take place in a building and did not take place in a formal manner, but the teacher, known as an Al-Mulla, taught his students under the shade of a palm tree. The Mulla depended on pieces of wooden boards on which students wrote Kura’an verses. This educational method depended almost entirely on memorization. Girls were educated in private by their peers or family members at home.
According to Muslim tradition, a teacher is well respected and has great value to the community. Ahmad Shawqi, a famous Arab author, wrote in a poem that we should stand up for a teacher out of respect since a teacher could have become a prophet. Mansour (1988) stated that teachers have had high public status, and many still do (p.4).

Historically, a move toward more formalized education in Saudi Arabia started in the 1930s when King Abdulaziz made the growth of educational opportunities his main objective. King Abdulaziz created the Saudi Institute of Science in 1937 to prepare Saudi citizens with the basic knowledge needed for Saudis to pursue higher education abroad (Al-Mubtaath, 1999). Under the supervision of Prince Fahad Ibn Abdulaziz, currently King Fahad, the Prince’s School, Saudi Arabia’s first formal school, opened in 1944. The fledging education program later was aided by King Faisal and King Fahad in 1949-50 with massive financial spending (http://www.saudinf.com/main/j4.htm). The increase in monetary expenditures on education led the country to establish the Ministry of Higher Education in 1952. The Ministry’s main objective is to educate Saudi citizens to be
capable of managing life and work in a complex modern economy.

The Saudi Ministry of Education

Under the auspices of the Saudi Ministry of Education, eleven schools, located in cities such as Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam, were established in 1952 with $3,414,348 allotted for the first-year budget. The expenditure increased to $23,623,256 in 1955 under the leadership of Prince Fahad Ibn Abdulaziz who was the first Minister of Education.

The Ministry would establish eight major universities with campuses located in various parts of the country: King Saud University in Riyadh (1957); Islamic University in Al-Madinah (1961); King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah (1967); Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud University in Riyadh (founded in 1953 and given university status in 1974); King Fahad University of Petroleum and Minerals in Dhahran (founded in 1968 and given university status in 1975); King Faisal University in Dammam (1975); Um Al-Qura University in Makkah (1979); and King Khalid University in Asir (1998) (http://www.saudinf.com/main/j4.htm).
The Deputy Minister of Higher Education declared in a 2001 newspaper article that the kingdom’s universities have the capacity to enroll 45 percent of that year’s high-school graduates. The deputy suggested that new graduates not attending college pursue such avenues as vocational education and jobs in the private sector. Today, the universities set certain criteria that high-school graduates must meet in order to enroll in college. Such criteria include English proficiency and independent study skills.

In the past, each university designed its own placement tests. However, innovative efforts are being made through The Ministry of Education’s National Center of Assessment to implement a new proficiency assessment test to be administered to every high school graduate for the purpose of helping universities in their admission procedures. The National Center of Assessment pilot-tested the assessment tool to better understand what kinds of questions the tool should contain (Ghazawi & Alfeheed, 2002). The test was administered at KFUPM, KFU, Um Alqura University, and 13 other testing centers for the first time to university applicants applying for the Autumn (2002) semester. Thirty to forty thousand students across the country were expected
to take the exam. This procedure is claimed by its developers to increase the number of students entering universities and to allow all students who deserve to study in universities to do so, according to their skills and abilities.

Since the 1930s, the Saudi population has increased by more than 400 percent, with the 1999 Saudi census reporting a population of 19,895,232. This tremendous growth has required the government to plan strategies for adequate housing and schools. School strategies are developed by the Ministry of Education, aided by the government’s supreme council of advisors and the ministers’ council headed by King Fahad. These groups are charged with the formulation of all educational policies and guidelines.

If a specific school wishes to make a change in curriculum (such as using a new textbook) or employing different testing strategies (portfolios, for example), the change must be approved by the Ministry which has several sub-offices in each of the five provinces. Although a province could change or amend a non-basic rule, such as classroom testing strategies, if approval is received from the Ministry, Saudi education basically is standardized in
the government’s public schools. The schools all have the same curriculum and use the same textbooks that are distributed by the Ministry of Education. (A sample translation of the latest set of guidelines from the ministry is included, Appendix O, p. 9)

The Ministry has established a twelve-year system of education that begins at six years of age and, upon successful completion, ends with high-school graduation. The three stages of this system are elementary school, intermediate (middle) school, and high school. The elementary stage consists of six school years, and the other two stages consist of three years each. Each year is divided into two academic semesters with a summer term for re-testing if students fail to score the minimum final grade, fifty points, in the second semester.

The first half of a textbook is typically taught during the opening semester, and the remainder during the second semester. In the upper-level grades, each semester ends with a two-week comprehensive exam of content covered in each course. The second semester exam tests only the second half of the textbook. However, students who fail to score at the
minimum level of fifty points must be tested on the whole book at the end of summer.

During the elementary stage, teachers cover the basic fundamentals of the Arabic language, math, science, and religion. In the past, the Ministry of Education tested all elementary students at the end of every semester. However, the Ministry now has waived semester exams for grades one through three. Instead, the teachers assess their students on a form known as a progress report. These young students are given grades of pass or fail based on their performance on weekly assignments.

In grades four through twelve, students are graded on a fifty-point scale, with fifteen points for participation and class activities, five points for attendance, and thirty points for the semester’s final exam grade. The fifteen-point participation grade may include behavior, assignments, or other criteria decided by the individual teacher. Those upper-level students (grades four through twelve) who fail more than four courses are required to repeat the year and are not allowed to proceed to the next grade level.

Students typically begin the three-year intermediate stage when they are about twelve years of age. In this
stage, students study new subjects such as English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The intermediate stage is designed to teach students to be able to think rationally, conceptualize, and do simple analysis; the intermediate stage also prepares students for the high-school stage through the introduction of new subjects. Intermediate students attend classes in religious studies which include the Holy Kura’an, Islamic reasoning (Tafseer), Islamic theology (Tawheed), jurisprudence (Feqh), and the Prophet tradition (Hadeeth); the Arabic language which includes literature, reading, grammar, and composition; social studies which include geography and history; science which includes math and biology; and practical studies which include art, physical education (for boys), and national and civic education. Girls, who now have formal schools of their own, do not study physical education in any grade, instead they take home economics, sewing, and needlecraft classes.

The Ministry of Education oversees all educational policies in government schools, including certain standardized tests that are given throughout Saudi Arabia. Both public and private schools are required to follow the ministry’s guidelines on subject matter, curriculum, grading
scales, and final tests. However, teachers of grades one through eleven have freedom to choose the testing procedures they believe are most suitable for classroom assessment of students. However, the freedom does not extend to standardized final exams.

Final exams for all twelfth-grade subjects are prepared by the Ministry’s representatives, then delivered to every high school, both public and private, the morning of the exam. The Ministry also sends a seating chart that assigns each student a seat number in the testing room. Each final-test package is stamped and sealed with wax by the Ministry’s representative. Only the school principal can open the packet with two teachers as witnesses an hour before the scheduled testing time. The student answer booklets are collected and returned to the Ministry’s Regional Head Office in wax-sealed envelopes for grading.

Parallel Education

In recent years, the number of private school in Saudi Arabia has increased, and it is normal to see one or two private schools in every neighborhoods. Because of the growth of private schools, the Ministry established the
Parallel Education Office to provide a communication link with the private schools. In addition, the Parallel Education Office supervises Islamic Awareness and Kura’an schools, special-education schools, adult-education and illiteracy schools, and foreign schools. The Ministry works with those schools to accommodate their needs. However, all licensed schools, whether public or private, must follow the Ministry’s education guideline guidelines.

The Ministry of Education designs and distributes all textbooks for grades one through twelve. Private and public schools are required to use these textbooks and cannot make substitutions for any of the approved textbooks. However, private schools may add supplemental textbooks, as long as those additional books have been reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education’s Regional Directorate.

Unlike public schools that do not teach EFL until the seventh grade, private schools often begin English instruction in grade one. Because the Ministry selects the seventh-grade EFL textbooks, seventh-grade students in private schools, who may have studied English for six years, use the same textbooks as seventh-grade students in public schools who are just beginning to study English. This can be
frustrating for private-school students who have reached a stage where they can read English but are required to use the Ministry-approved textbook that teaches the alphabet, for example. Thus, some textbook issues need to be resolved in the future.

Saudi EFL students begin with basic instruction that includes the identification of letters, sounds, and words, as well as the construction of simple sentences. The current EFL curriculum was updated in 1993. This curriculum includes authentic texts and exercises based essentially on the communicative approach. This researcher was a member of the committee that prepared the EFL texts currently used in Saudi Arabian schools.

Even though the curriculum is student-centered and utilizes hands-on activities, many learners do not know what to do when faced with a problem such as figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. According to Al-Jurf (1996), Saudi students face reading difficulties because they try to recognize English words rather than explore various connotation of terms to understand the text. Some educators believe this may be due to teachers who influence the students to memorize words and their meanings instead of
reading the text for contextual clues to appropriate meaning of vocabulary. Indeed, memorization has been a traditional teaching/learning technique in Saudi Arabia for years.

This researcher visited three private school in the Eastern Province during month of April 2000. The schools, Manarat Al-Sharqiah, Al-Saad Schools, and Dhahran Private Schools, have received the top annual award for excellence in education from the Ministry for the past ten years. This researcher observed that the three schools taught from the Ministry-issued textbooks but supplemented them with additional texts. The researcher also observed that most of the private-school teachers were foreigners, while most of the public-school teachers were Saudis who were recent college graduates with limited teaching experience. Until now, there has been no emphasis on authentic assessment that enfolds portfolio self-assessment. Authentic assessment has now played a role in the Saudi Arabian context specially with mobilization of new assessment guideline (Appendix O). Moreover, authentic assessment is a versatile umbrella. So, to narrow it down, the research uses self-assessment portfolio.
Purpose of the Study

The Saudi Ministry of Education requires the teaching of English as a foreign language beginning in the seventh grade at schools in Saudi Arabia. These EFL courses have, unfortunately, come to be dreaded by many students who typically have no previous experience in learning a foreign language and who are often extremely fearful of the standardized tests given in EFL program. At least this is the researcher’s point of view as a person who has English for 5 years in Saudi schools and several news articles that were published in Arabic newspapers such as Alyuuum Newspaper on June 6, 2001, on the success rate of the match textbook Ministry exam. Every student terrorized of the final exams; however, the Ministry exam grading center reported that the test scores were normal and within expectations: Official reply.

The purpose of this case study was to examine the perceptions of students and educators toward the use of alternative assessment—namely, the self-assessment portfolio—in three EFL classes at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The case study approach allowed this researcher to
investigate EFL student and educator reactions to the introduction of an innovative type of assessment in the school’s EFL curriculum.

The EFL students were asked to utilize self-assessment portfolios that encouraged the students to write weekly journals, answer a set of questions each week, and reflect upon their own learning processes. These self-assessment portfolios were designed to enable the students to become aware of both successful and unsuccessful strategies that they applied in learning English as a foreign language.

Systematic literature search was conducted by this researcher in both Saudi Arabia and the United States. No previous studies were found on either the introduction or the use of self-assessment portfolios in Saudi EFL classes. This case study is significant because it will provide a look at selected students views and reactions towards the introduction of a Westernized approach into the Saudi educational system. The Saudi Educational system has a tradition of rote learning and standardized testing, which led to negative perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students and myself, as a former student, result in reduced acquisition of English. Thus, there is a need to
explore alternative approaches to EFL assessment in Saudi Arabian context. Results of this study will be of value in determining whether learners self-assessment via portfolios would be a valuable alternative in EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia.

Design of the Study

This study employed primarily a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. The data included student self-assessment portfolios (which contained classroom handouts or assignments and items the students felt were relevant, and self-assessment journals); researcher observations and field notes, and interviews with EFL students (Appendices E and F), EFL teachers (Appendix G), and Saudi school administrators (Appendix H). The students answered questions posed by the researcher and their answers were included in their portfolios. The EFL teachers were invited to comment on the students’ portfolios. Chapter Three describes the methodology used, including procedures participants, and data collection.
Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to guide this case study of self-assessment portfolios used for the first time in selected EFL classes in Saudi Arabia:

1) What are the perceptions of EFL learners at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school toward self-assessment portfolios? For example, do the students report the portfolios to be helpful in their EFL learning? What are the students cultural perceptions toward the introduction of a foreign concept (i.e., self-assessment portfolios) into their EFL instructional program?

2) Do the students perceive the self-assessment portfolios as helpful to them in identifying their strengths and their weaknesses?

3) What are the perceptions of EFL teachers at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school?

4) What are the perceptions of selected administrators in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia toward the use of self-assessment portfolios?

5) What possible adjustments or changes might be required in order to further implement the use of self-
assessment portfolios at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school and other schools in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia?

6) What preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the introduction of non-indigenous (western) instructional strategy (self-assessment portfolios) into a Saudi intermediate school?

**Basic Assumptions**

In order to carry out the case study, the following assumptions were made:

1. Using portfolios as a self-assessment tool assists EFL students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses regarding the skills students employ when learning English. Self-assessment portfolios help students to identify their metacognitive strategies while learning EFL (Shohamy, 1994) and reflect about their process of learning, including their personal learning strategies. This tool helps students to be aware of what they are studying and to develop opinions about how they are studying in English classes.
2. The participants in this study made an effort to keep a self-assessment portfolio and responded honestly to the self-report answers. The students were not negatively influenced by the presence of this researcher to cause students to alter their own opinions and perceptions about self-assessment portfolios.

3. It was assumed that participants had no previous experience studying English through the use of portfolios.

4. It was assumed that EFL students, instructors, and administrators would engage themselves appropriately with self-assessment portfolios.

**Limitations**

The study took place during a single semester lasting 16 weeks. The design of the study did not include the evaluation of student performance in relation to their self-assessment perceptions. Since the study intended to understand students’ perceptions towards the introduction of a non-indigenous approach (self-assessment portfolios), the researcher and EFL teachers did not find it necessary to score the portfolios for the final grade. The grading system
is controlled by the Ministry and changes in that system should first be approved by the Ministry. The Ministry approval time could have hampered the efforts of the research because the Ministry would have assigned a panel to study the proposed changes. This study also was limited to the extent that it is based on self-assessment portfolios in three classes and included such variables as different student backgrounds. Since the study concerns EFL learners, it may include Saudi and non-Saudi students in the targeted school since children of expatriates living in Saudi Arabia share classrooms with Saudi students. Different cultural backgrounds may have enriched the study. The researcher noticed the difference between Egyptian and Saudi children where the later tend not speak nor express their opinions as much as the former. Finally, only male students were studied since the researcher is not allowed to access any female schools due to segregation, one-gender schools, of females and males in all educational settings including universities. The segregation of genders is due to religious reasons of not mixing females and males if they are not married.
**Delimitation**

The researcher selected three intermediate classes in one school for the case study, and thus the findings cannot be generalized to other intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia or to schools in other countries. However, the case study methodology does permit findings to be applied to the research site, Manarat Al-Shargiah intermediate school.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms are operationally defined to provide the reader the necessary background to comprehend their use in the present study:

*Al-Khobar* is a town in Saudi Arabia’s Eastern Administrative Region; it faces the coast of the Persian Gulf and is five miles east of Dhahran and eight miles south of Dammam. *Assessment* relates to the on-going measurement of EFL student knowledge, skills, and proficiency in English. Assessment also includes a collection of procedures and practices (e.g., use of self-assessment portfolios) that a specific setting has chosen to introduce.
**Authentic assessment** describes and reflects real-world type EFL-student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitude in classroom activities (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996). Authentic assessment includes alternative methods of assessment such as self-assessment, teacher assessment, collaborative assessment, and portfolio assessment.

**Deficiencies** are obstacles to learning that affect the ability of the foreign-language learner to perform tasks in the foreign language, for example, vocabulary development in English reading.

**EFL** refers to English as a foreign language and is used to refer to English instruction that occurs in a non-English-speaking context such as in Saudi Arabia, where the language of mass communication is Arabic.

**Errors** are learners’ unintentional mistakes that hinder the learning process. Ellis (1994) reported three kinds of error sampling (i.e., massive, specific, and incidental) which did not lead to better judging of errors by non-native speakers (NNSs). In general, the most crucial questions addressed by error evaluations are the judging of the most problematic errors, weighing the differences in the evaluation of NS and NNSs errors, and criteria for evaluating errors. For
example, failure to use third-person singular “s” when writing English may not be a serious error by native speakers of English because the omission typically does not affect one’s comprehension of the intended message.

ESL refers to English as a second language—English that is used and spoken in authentic English-speaking contexts such as the United States.

FL stands for foreign language, a language that serves as a means of communication in a region that speaks a different language for mass communication. English in Saudi Arabia is considered to be a foreign language.

FLL stands for foreign-language learner. For example, the Saudi intermediate school students in this study.

L2 stands for second language, a language that serves as a means of communication for non-natives in a specific region, for example, English as spoken by a Saudi who is studying or working in the United States.

NNS stands for non-native speaker, a speaker of a language different than the person’s mother tongue. For example, most Saudi students are non-native speakers of English.

NUD*IST is Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing software. This software helps
qualitative researchers to analyze data by coding data in trees or nodes. (Please see Appendix D for a sample page). OHP is an over-head projector. This piece of equipment has become standard in many EFL classes. Portfolio is a collection of student work over a period of time (e.g., a semester or an academic calendar year) that is designed to show student work over that period of time. Such progress may include documentation of a learner’s knowledge and abilities (Short, 1993), or it may simply be a collection of the students’ work. Portfolio assessment is a method of assessment that shows student work in a certain subject or class. Portfolio assessment can be defined as the collection and evaluation of learner in an effort to better represent student learning and encourage learner achievement. A specific rubric or checklist may be established by the students and teacher in a collaborative fashion. Portfolio assessment indicates to the students and teacher the progress achieved from the beginning to the end of a time period, with special emphasis on student reflections that are an integral part of the portfolio. In this case study, portfolio assessment is used in conjunction with self-assessment as a new Westernized
approach. Students perception of the experience is the target of the study.

**Self-assessment** is a form of assessment appropriate within a learner-centered educational philosophy (Hamp-Lyons, 1990). Self-assessment is defined as an analysis of student work based on judgments made by the student which are meant to lead meaningful learning. Students follow certain procedures agreed upon by the teacher and the student. Such a method may help the student to de-fossilize certain learner errors (Shohamy, 1994).

**Self-assessment journal** is part of the self-assessment portfolio. The journal includes student-written entries reflecting on the process of the student’s learning. For this case study, the researcher provided the student participants with a list of general questions to reflect on in the journal. For example: What is the most important skill you learned this week? Student responses are not intended to measure what they learned, but evaluate how they learned (Brown, 1998).

**SL** refers to second language, a language that serves as a means of communication in a speaking region by a non-native,
such as English spoken by a Saudi studying or working in the United States.

**SLL** refers to a second-language learner, such as Saudis learning English in the United States for university admission or for a variety of purposes. **Student participants** are the intermediate school learners who participated in this study and provided the student feedback data for the study. **Task** is an instructional language-learning activity in which the FLL engages in a certain activity designed to cause learning of the L2 to occur (e.g., students interview each other in classroom pairs about their favorite school subject) (Green, 1998). **TEFL** refers to teaching English as a foreign language. An example is learning the English language in a non-English-speaking region such as Saudi Arabia, typically for academic reading and writing purposes. **TESL** refers to teaching English as a second language. An example is teaching English to Saudis who are studying university level English in the United States. **Testing** refers to the giving of tests and is defined as the methodology used to demonstrate student achievement in an
intended topic, theme, or aspect of language. Testers may use norm-referencing or criterion-referencing in their test development. An example is the 50-point semester examination given to intermediate school EFL learners at the research site.

**TESOL** refers to teaching English to speakers of other languages and the training of teachers in the methodologies of English as a second or foreign language instruction. **TOEFL** refers to the Test of English as a Foreign Language. This test is an admission requirement by American and Canadian universities such as The Ohio State University for non-native speakers of English.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation used several qualitative methods to examine perceptions and reactions of intermediate EFL learners, teachers, and demonstrators toward self-assessment portfolios in English as a foreign-language classes. The researcher collected data in three EFL classrooms at the Manarat Al-Shargiah intermediate school in Al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia. The study is organized into five chapters: Chapter One is the introduction, Saudi setting, and overview of the
study. Chapter Two presents a review of the professional literature that provided the theoretical background for the study. Chapter Three details the methods used by the researcher in conducting the study. Chapter Four presents the data and discussion. Chapter Five, describes the findings, limitations, answers research questions, evaluation of curriculum, needed teacher training, personal analysis, and limitations. Also, chapter five portrays implications of the research site, implications for the intervention of a western innovation in a Saudi intermediate school and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

For as long as educators can remember, the mainstay of standardized student assessment has been the multiple-choice test, wrote O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996). According to Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000), the objective, standardized multiple-choice test was developed during and after World War I as part of a movement at that time to view education as a “factory model.” These “new-type” objective tests could be scored automatically and easily subjected to statistical analyses. The tests, continued Hamp-Lyon and Condon, were responsive to no curriculum in particular, to no learners in particular, and to no context in particular. “They were responsive only to the demand for reliability, for scores that could be perfectly replicated in parallel forms of tests, or with the same learner on different occasions” (Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2000, p. 171).
In no country did the multiple-choice test take such a stronghold as it did in the United States, noted Hamp-Lyons and Condon. But by the 1980s, a number of educators had raised concerns about American reliance on assessment that audited student performance without simultaneously enhancing student performance. And in a 1983 report entitled *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education blasted the American school system, writing that the deplorable conditions of the American educational institution would result in the destruction of American culture and the American economy (Stavar, 1992). The report also stated that American schools were graduating students who could not handle even moderately challenging intellectual tasks.

As educators discussed ways to improve the quality of American education, one area that came under scrutiny was the country’s reliance on multiple-choice and other forms of standardized testing. The reliance on multiple-choice tests may have been psychometrically and economically efficient, but such tests did not support the development of skills and abilities needed by learners to succeed in life or to progress in a specific discipline, wrote Stansfield (1994).
By incorporating productive skills tests and tests based on authentic tasks into the curriculum, Stansfield continued, testing could progress beyond an evaluative role to also providing a supporting role in the educational system.

Stansfield (1994, p. 65) listed nine tenets that underlie the contribution tests can make to educational reform: 1) Tests can affect curriculum and learning. 2) Tests can provide feedback on learning. 3) Tests can help implement content and performance standards. 4) Tests can influence the methodology teachers use. 5) Tests can motivate teachers and students. 6) Tests can orient students as to what is important to learn. 7) Tests can help guide needed teacher training. 8) Tests can help implement articulation. 9) Tests can help implement educational reform. But tests true to the above tenets had to go beyond multiple-choice exam formats; they needed to also include authentic assessments such as portfolios.

The present chapter presents a review of literature pertinent to authentic assessment, particularly in relation to self-assessment portfolios and English as a foreign-language learning.
Authentic Assessment

O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) used the term authentic to describe forms of assessment that are consistent with classroom goals, curricula, and instruction. They wrote that authentic assessment offers an alternative to traditional, standardized forms of testing such as multiple-choice tests. The authors noted that authentic and alternative assessment is, by definition, criterion-referenced and is based on activities that represent both classroom and real-life settings.

According to Student Portfolios, the context, purpose, audience, and constraints of authentic assessment must connect in some way to real life situations and problems. The assessment might be in the form of a performance test, a set of observations, a set of open-ended questions, an exhibition, an interview, or a portfolio (p. 94).

With the movement toward a whole-language approach in foreign-language learning, there has evolved a set of authentic methods of teaching and testing. Authentic assessment can be described as procedures for evaluating “learning performance using multiple forms of assessment
that reflect student learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant classroom activities” (O’Malley and Chamot, 1999, p. 4). The authors suggested using self-assessment portfolios as an authentic method of assessment. Alternative or authentic assessment focuses on using creative approaches to discover what students know and can do, which is also an expected outcome of communicative language teaching. Authentic assessment also encourages students to use declarative knowledge while studying, and it supports higher-order of thinking skills.

Different tasks in foreign-language learning require students to use different skills. For example, multiple-choice tests tend to require simple language abilities to perform the task compared with the skills needed for such tasks as answering open-ended questions (Joh, 1997). Spolsky (1991) suggested using different forms of testing such as diagnostic testing that includes observation of readers to analyze reading skills. Spolsky also suggested incorporating self-assessment into diagnostic testing in order to provide additional sources of information to the diagnostics. Finally, Spolsky recommended that science influence the art of testing, leading to fair and reliable
subjective measures that result in responsible language testing.

One of several movements toward authentic assessment of EFL learners uses multiple pathways to study how FLLs construct new knowledge. This strategy is influenced by the concept that authentic assessment helps students understand why they reached a particular answer, whereas traditional testing only seeks the correct answer (Fischer and King, 1995). These researchers believe that students can become active contributors in the learning process and that this active process enables students to become responsible for creating and constructing their answers. In addition, it tends to create autonomous language learners, an appropriate goal given the long term nature of second language learning.

O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) also claimed that self-assessment enlightens students as to their attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses in reading. This encourages students to be self-adjusters of their own weaknesses. These researchers propose several forms of self-assessment (e.g., reading surveys, emergent reading, reading activities, and reading strategies). They added that it is the teacher’s creativity and lesson plans, along with the students’ needs,
that indicate which type of authentic assessment ESL teachers can employ with useful results.

Shohamy (1994) introduced several types of authentic assessment that enable ESL teachers to learn more about their students' strengths and weaknesses in using the four language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The different forms of assessment include observations, questionnaires, interviews, homework, documents from test-taker files, letters, diaries, portfolios, and self-assessment. Shohamy and several other researchers such as Valencia, Hiebert, and Affleberg (1994) and Valette (1994) suggested that authentic assessment allows for a thorough analysis of a student's performance. Traditional tests, such as standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests, TOEFL, and MILAB— that depended on multiple-choice questions—do not offer similar results. Standardized tests are sometimes particularly difficult for foreigners since foreign students who have limited experience in the United States may be unfamiliar with this type of assessment. Standardized tests provide EFL teachers with an incomplete picture of student needs and strengths since such tests assess only language components (O’Malley
and Chamot, 1996). Grammar, reading, and vocabulary knowledge are measured, and progress in a student’s oral or written proficiencies over a period of time are ignored. O’Malley and Chamot also wrote that standardized tests have not been effective in assessing the higher-order thinking skills such as analyzing texts or describing why a text was difficult that students employ to solve language-learning problems.

Balliro (1993) discussed problems associated with the term “alternative assessment.” The author clarified the misunderstanding of the term as it has been increasingly used by ESL teachers. Assessment of several language proficiency skills requires establishing rubrics for what counts while assessing FLLs literacy and language acquisition. The author suggested collaboration and negotiation among teachers and students in order to develop a product with a potential group effort outcome.

Portfolios

Portfolios are at the forefront of alternative-assessment approaches, noted Hamp-Lyons (1996). In Hancock (1994, p. 238), a portfolio is defined as the collection of
a learner’s work assembled for the purpose of determining how much has been learned. Hancock wrote that the portfolio may include: examples of the learner’s completion of tasks such as reports, both oral and written; creative projects such as artwork; contributions to group projects; and writings such as essays, poems, and written homework. The items chosen for inclusion in the portfolio can be selected by the learner, the teacher or both. It also typically includes student reflections about their work decision-making process for including certain examples of their work.

According to Schrier and Hammadou (1994), portfolio assessment is particularly applicable to foreign-language assessment. Standardized tests, note O’Malley and Chamot (1990), provide foreign-language teachers with an incomplete picture of student needs and learning. Foreign-language teachers can use portfolios to collect a student’s writing samples, classroom tests, work in cooperative group projects, teacher observations, interviews, and think-aloud protocol (Cohen, 1990, 1998).

Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2000) suggested that portfolios are especially suitable for use with non-native English-speaking students because portfolios provide a broader
measure of what students can do, and because they replace timed writing contexts, which has long been claimed to be particularly discriminatory against non-native writers.

It is believed that portfolios first were used as a tool for student assessment in visual-art classes. Such portfolios typically included student art projects from concept to preliminary work to final product. Hiemstra and Brockett (1994) noted that the art portfolios might also include a student’s written reflections on the art projects, teacher comments, and classmate critiques.

Portfolio assessment was introduced into the mainstream curriculum of foreign-language classes about two decades ago and is now used in a number of North American schools. Portfolios can be described as a collection of practical examples of FL learning experiences (O’Malley and Chamot, 1996). Keeping portfolios teaches learners to be responsible for monitoring their own learning process, progress, and success (Glazor and Brown, 1998). When learners are involved and responsible for collecting and answering classroom needs and objectives, they learn to be independent and autonomous learners (Fischer and King, 1995). Portfolios provide rich information regarding the curriculum and its implementation.
Portfolios also provide students with the ability to search and accumulate required knowledge and skills for the subject or the task. The advantages of portfolios may be expressed in terms of what they focus on: process instead of product; long-term progress evaluation instead of a one-time test or a mark on a Scantron answer sheet; a self-evaluation process instead of someone else’s judgment in evaluation; several types of tests instead of one form of test; long-term evaluation instead of paying attention solely to the final product; and collaborative efforts of students, teachers, and books instead of individual efforts (Valencia, Hiebert, and Affleberg 1994).

When SL/FL learners acquire the necessary skills for a particular subject or task at an early stage of life or at an early stage of exposure to EFL, they tend to scaffold those successful strategies and use them again in the future. Shores and Grace (1998) suggested that portfolios support child-centered learning and help students to acquire successful learning strategies in early stages. Shores and Grace proposed ten systematic process steps for teachers to ensure successful attainment of a portfolio processes. The ten-steps are as follows: (1) establish a portfolio policy;
(2) collect work samples; (3) shoot photographs; (4) use learning logs; (5) interview children; (6) take systematic records; (7) take anecdotal records; (8) prepare narrative reports; (9) conduct three-way conferences; and (10) prepare pass-along portfolios. In addition, it can be assumed that portfolios encourage students to take risks and it also support a creative educational learning environment.

Foreign-language teachers can employ specific techniques in using portfolios such as informal reading inventories, classroom tests, teacher observations, evaluation of students’ work, interviews, think-a-loud protocols, cooperative group projects, and writing samples (Cohen, 1988, 1990, and 1998). Fischer and King (1995) introduced categories of portfolios; for example, collection over time, representation of authentic tasks that represent various purposes, presentation of an array of cognitive strategies that are required by NNS to advance in the target language, indication of different developmental levels, demonstration of the uniqueness of every student, presentation of collaborative reaction by student and teacher, guiding instruction that leads to habit, and accentuation of what students know.
O’Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) wrote that a key element of portfolios is student self-assessment; without self-assessment and reflection on the part of the student, a portfolio is not a portfolio. According to these researchers, the self-assessment called for by portfolios can have several outcomes for the student: students take responsibility for knowing where they are with regard to learning goals; students broaden their view of what is being learned; and students begin to see language learning as a process. The case study being presented in this dissertation is particularly concerned with the use of portfolios for self-assessment in an EFL context.

**Self-Assessment and Learning**

Foreign language students may think of the process of learning a foreign language in general as a process of documenting what and how they learn (Short, 1993). This approach can be considered as self-assessment approach, which can be used separately or as part of a portfolio. Portfolio assessment is just one form of self-directed learning found to be appropriate within learner-centered educational philosophy (Hamp-Lyons, 1990).
Portfolio assessment may also include “observation and evaluation of the thinking process students use in arriving at a response or a demonstration of knowledge and skills” (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996, p. 169). Liskin-Gasparro suggested that this type of assessment is useful to evaluate the processes students use to complete a particular task. In such a task, students feel a commitment and involvement in evaluating themselves in learning the foreign language (Tierney, Carter, and Desai, 1991). The authors noted that portfolios can help bring about student achievement improvements. Students also tend to feel that their effort is valuable since it allows them to include their individual differences. Such a process attempts to shift the paradigm of assessment from content evaluation to student performance.

This process also links assessment and teaching to learning (Tierney, Carter, and Desai 1991). In the self-assessment process, the teacher functions as an important collaborator to create tasks and develop guidelines for scoring and interpreting student work. However, it is the students themselves who make the assignments based on established guidelines.
Oxford (1994) suggested that strategies form the tools for student self-directed involvement in learning. Such strategies, Oxford proposes, included guessing techniques, willingness to make mistakes, looking for patterns, and taking advantage of all practice opportunities. Such strategies may be necessary for novice FL students since they tend to learn and use different unsuccessful strategies. Novice students may not alternate unsuccessful learning strategies with successful ones since they cannot yet identify proper skills for learning a foreign language.

For example, vocabulary-guessing strategies are important in reading a second language that may include both familiar and unknown vocabulary items. A self-directed approach requires that learners seek the meaning of words with strategies to figure out the unknown terms and expressions. Traditionally, foreign-language learners assume that knowing the meaning of every word will facilitate reading, whether or not knowledge of a specific word is required (Abdulwahab, 1997). Many foreign-language learners assume that knowing or looking up every word is the solution to understanding the text. However, understanding the text always requires more than single vocabulary decoding.
Strategies learned in EFL classes can evolve into skills that may be transferred and used in other courses. And, of course, nobody knows every work in a language, even native speakers of the language.

The EFL class objectives interweave with student goals when the students use self-assessment to become engaged in understanding the process of every task and then analyzing it. Student critiques help students to become immersed in the task because a critique does not occur without an understanding of the task first and then applying that task the student’s learning repertoire. The teacher should not influence the students to think in a certain fashion since every student is unique in the process of thinking; instead, the teacher should try to help the students to find ways to tackle a problem and determine why that approach worked or failed. Foreign language students become engaged learners of English when they understand the functions of a particular learning environment (Newman, 1997).

**Portfolio Assessment Research**

Portfolio assessment may trigger teachers to develop more challenging materials that motivates students to
demonstrate what they know (Bonilla-Brown, 1999). However, the implementation of portfolios require teachers and students to understand the criteria towards which they will be working during the semester or quarter. Bonilla-Brown suggested that students improve their performance when they are encouraged to establish the standards on how to their portfolios will be evaluated. Those standards may become internalized in student classroom activities which, in turn, offer the students the responsibility to define and identify their work performance in cooperation with their instructors.

Portfolios are useful in assessing writing skills. Writing-portfolio-assessment researchers have recommended additional research in portfolio assessment in different learning strategies (Ferris, 1995; Hamp-Lyons, 1995; and Murphy, 1999). Ferris, Hamp-Lyons, and Murphy suggested that ESL teachers utilize portfolio assessment in their classrooms. Murphy suggested that portfolios may be related to the student progress process by characterizing the student’s thoughts, beliefs, and accomplishments across different writing experiences. Ferris, Hamp-Lyons, and
Murphy did not restrict what constitute a portfolio, but they suggested elements such as learning journals.

Brindley (1990) considers self-assessment a form of assessment that is appropriate within the learner-centered educational philosophy. Learning journals can become a component of a student’s portfolio. Self-assessment journals encourage students to document their feedback on the process of learning. Other components of portfolios might be a section where students learn how to critique content in addition to their learning process. This process increases validity since it may allow transferability of self-assessment skills to other subjects or tasks (Johnson, 1990).

When FLLs receive self-feedback through self-assessment journals, they tend to feel positive towards their learning since it is a process-oriented learning outcome (McGregor, 1991). McGregor recommended that FL teachers develop self-assessment skills with EFL students so that the students become sensitive to their own needs and objectives. McGregor found that the process model of self-assessment helps in improving FL classroom teaching and increases FL learners’ confidence. Also, when FL students know the
process of solving a problem, they then tend to be enthusiastic and motivated (Rosa and Montero, 1990). This approach was endorsed by John Dewey in 1938, long before the evolution of learning-strategies research. Dewey was one of the founders of the progressive education movement at the Bank Street College in New York. The main concern was to focus on classroom activities that related to the child’s experiences, interests, and goals (Newman, 1997).

Fischer and King (1995) reported that there are different types of portfolios. The most common types are the showcase portfolio, the record-keeping portfolio, and the working portfolio. Showcase portfolios are collections of a student’s work—paintings for example. Students choose what they want to add in the portfolio and arrange it in a presentable fashion. The record-keeping portfolio is similar to a diary of a particular class. The student is responsible for the writing of class notes and accumulating them in the portfolio. The teacher does not interfere with the students in the kind of records the students make or the way students accumulate those records. Finally, the working portfolio focuses on the coherence of the students’ and teachers’ efforts to collect and accumulate the portfolio so it
benefits the students. Students and teachers work together in the to assess and evaluate the students’ work. Students select samples to include in the portfolio that represent their learning progress. In the later stages of developing the portfolio, students feel a sense of ownership of the portfolio because they consider it as a project they worked hard to accomplish. The teacher, on the other hand, only has control over the process of selecting and contributing pieces to the portfolio.

Validity, Reliability, and Practicality of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolio design and development requires that the teacher stress the purposes of the portfolio and how it will be used in assessment. Teachers of English as a second language need to reflect on student portfolios to evaluate their own teaching instead of conducting informational tests (Johnson, 1996). Learning how to assess portfolios is a tool that helps students to learn the procedures and the process of solving learning problems. Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, and Wheeler (1996) suggested that adding cooperative learning within a group of learners may
influence positive learning attitudes toward a second language. They also suggested that students engage in group discussions three times a year so that they react with positive feedback to each other without the direct authoritarian influence of the teacher. “Cooperative learning groups provided L2 learners with a context in which they could talk aloud to themselves—that is, produce ‘private speech’—as a way of helping them solve problems” (Jacob, Rottenberg, Patrick, and Wheeler, 1996, p.267). This type of engaged assessment assists students to become involved in the process which in turn increases portfolio validity, reliability, and practicality.

In order for the students to master the EFL language, they have to master the content and the proper skills the EFL teacher tries to teach during the class. In other words, the students have to understand the content of the lesson/s. This mastery can be obtained via Content Based Assessment (CBA). The validity of this type of test is meaningful since it acts as a reflection of the lectured skills needed for the lesson and its appropriateness to the language (Weigle and Jensen, 1997). These researchers concluded that CBA test validity should reflect the teaching objectives, “the focus
of instruction must be reflected in the focus of evaluation for decisions to be fair and accurate” (p. 204). For example, the present research project aims to stimulate students to be able to analyze their studying behaviors and to learn how to be self-adjusters. The validity of the self-assessment worksheets can be obtained by observing students’ weekly reactions (Weigle and Jensen). These worksheets thus become valuable learning tools.

The validity of the self-assessment portfolios should attempt to describe and analyze the practices the FL learners’ performance to carry out the EFL class tasks (Lazarton, 1996). Lazarton indicated that validity in qualitative research is not employed in language-testing research. Qualitative research methodology can be used in combination with quantitative research to interpret data that cannot be interpreted with controlled variables (Bachman, 1990).

The second concern of tests in general is reliability. Reliability in quantitative testing is defined as the consistency of scores of the test across different instances (Snow and Brinton, 1997). Scoring procedures, test-taking time, and inter-rater scoring are factors that affect the
reliability of tests. In both educational and research settings, researchers and EFL teachers need to understand the factors that may affect performance scores in English.

Bachman suggested that L2 teachers should account for the interpretations of test scores instead of ranking student’ scores on grid sheets. Tests are designed to provide information about the L2 learner’s knowledge of the FL such as vocabulary. One of those factors of knowledge is observing student performance in the FL. Observing performance is obtained by stimulating the FL students to reflect what they have applied while they were studying and to become aware of the task so they become independent learners. Variables related to reliability of EFL assessment using portfolio in different educational settings such as Saudi Arabia are student learning abilities, student cultural and non-academic responses to the introduction of a foreign concept (i.e., portfolios), and student competence for language learning skills. Reliability needs to be based on performance instead of idiosyncratic scores that have no preset criteria (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1997). One of the main problems of reliability in L2 portfolio assessment
is inter-rater reliability, consistency of scores because teacher are not used to this new concept of assessment.

The purpose of assessment should be understood by the students. The students may type the purpose and scoring rubrics on the cover page of the portfolio. The rubric can be decided by the teacher solely or the teacher can discuss the rubrics with the students. And as noted before, having students involved in the rubrics gives the students the feeling of responsibility for the portfolio. Students can discuss what to include if they all agree about the criteria; for example, the student used a clear introduction and explanation of the problem. Each criterion should be more difficult than the previous one to demand of the students progressive difficulty of effort. This progressive effort helps the EFL teacher and researcher to observe and control the student views of their problems as the class progresses. For example, if the student shows control over a certain skill such as clear presentation of the problem and an effort in correcting it, then the student is improving. Rubrics should include development and organization, fluency of idea (problem) description, and mechanics (O’Malley and Valdez Pierce, 1996).
Language learning skills, not specific to any language skill (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), help students learn and practice EFL. Student use of strategies takes place as a result of successful learning strategies. Successful learning strategies come about giving a reason to use those strategies and a reason why not (Green and Oxford, 1995). Green and Oxford summarized good learners’ methods, behaviors, steps, and techniques. The authors give the example of Lazlo who looked for conversation partners to practice the language.

Another student, Oke, collected and arranged words, grouped them, and then labeled each group. Ahmed used hand gestures to communicate when he could not verbalize words. Mai Qi broke words down into roots, suffixes, and prefixes. Finally, Young applied guessing strategies while reading. The students tried to conceptualize and consciously apply reading strategies. Green and Oxford conclude that students succeed when they become aware of the key importance of active use of FLL strategies, especially in situations where the students have the opportunity to practice needed strategies. Learning strategies should include social and operational characteristics while learning “along with more
intellectual sides. The L2 learner is not just a cognitive and metacognitive machine, but rather, a whole person” (Oxford and Green, p. 3). These researchers also asked L2 teachers to encourage their students to “develop social strategies, as well as intellectually related strategies based on their individual learning styles, current strategy use, and specific goals” (p. 4).

Other researchers such as Ferris and Tagg (1996) indicated that student use of authentic strategies—strategies that can be applied in future classes—are more important than strategies that might not be authentic in their future lives. Even though Ferris and Tagg’s research centered on listening and speaking tasks, the outcomes and their recommendations facilitate the learning of all four language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading). In fact, Ferris and Tagg discovered in their study that their students did not meet professors’ “expectations/requirements” for academic ESL learning skills (p. 303).
Language Learner Strategies Research

This section provides a brief review of language learner strategies research in an attempt to illustrate those stages of authentic teaching and assessment which led the way to the development of the self-assessment portfolio. Research on learner strategies offers information that has resulted in the production of texts that are intended for teaching several different techniques for example, Practical techniques for language teaching by Lewis and Hill, (1985); Techniques in teaching vocabulary by Allen (1983), Techniques and resources in teaching reading by Silberstein, (1994); The English verb by Lewis, (1988); Teaching and learning vocabulary by Taylor, (1990); and Practical Techniques for language teaching by Lewis and Hill. Textbook publishers always try to present new books in the field with materials that attract teachers. ESL textbook publishers print ESL textbooks with the trend or approach current teachers think as significant to their teaching such as authentic assessment. An ESL teacher probably prefer to have a textbook ready to use that suits his/her ESL class or syllabus with a current practical language approach. Therefore, ESL textbook publishers try to meet that demand
by producing EFL textbooks with several prepared lesson plans for teachers such as TESOL New Ways series. Other studies on teaching methods which were conducted to identify the most efficient method EFL teachers should use, such as Nerenz and Knop (1982), were inconclusive. Psycho-linguistic studies report the mental process S/FLLs use in learning, understanding, and producing that language. As a result, those studies hypothesized a theory and then test that hypothesis. This research method resulted in unsuitable recommendations and suggestions to be generalized due to several interesting variables such as student learning processes and behaviors.

When SL students think aloud of the strategies they use, they tend to close the learning gaps communicatively (Cohen, 1990). The think-aloud technique used by Cohen included interviews, verbal reporting, and written learning logs. Cohen interviewed ESL students to discover the strategies they use while studying. He confirmed student use of a particular strategy by using a verbal reporting technique (interview). Cohen concluded that verbal reporting could be useful for self-observation so learners confirm a certain language behavior they have used introspectively or
retrospectively. Also, verbal reporting may help ESL students in self-revelation where they think-aloud while performing a particular learning task, so they establish a sense of consciousness of the information to which they pay attention (Cumming, 1994). As a result, Cohen suggested that such verbal reports are not intended to measure students' performance, but rather, to offer the FL student the strategies to think about the cognitive process: the skill used in a particular learning task.

Skills and strategies seem to transfer from one subject to another, from one task to another, and from one language to another (Chamot and O’Malley, 1987, and O’Malley and Chamot, 1996). As a result, FL learning skills are important to teach to FLLs who need appropriate techniques to pursue several tasks. Leki (1995) studied the academic literacy experiences of five students' different learning strategies that they brought with them from their L1 to their first academic experience in a large North American university, L2. Leki research on learners changing strategies suggested that ESL students come to United States universities with a variety of existing comprehensive strategies that help them to cope with their assignments such as skimming a text to
find certain information. Leki concluded that her students were able to adjust their strategies and pursue others when their first attempts were unsuccessful. Such efforts were conscious for some students, but unconscious for others. Some students spent a longer time to shift to alternative strategies when necessary. This shift may lead ESL students to experience confidence in the strategies they used due to the sense of achievement in the F/SL learning setting. Foreign-language learners try to seek help when they fail to use a FL learning strategy such as encountering a new word while reading their an English text in their textbooks. Widdowson (1998) implied that linguists attempted to bring adjustments in teaching methods and materials to help FLLs in their second language or foreign language learning efforts. Such efforts led to the discovery of communicative approaches to syllabus design that helped students to learn EFL/ESL communicatively and as close to real life as possible. Researchers in applied linguistics and the ESL field have supported these communicative approaches. Researchers such as Brumfit (1979); Darling-Hammond (1993); Hymes (1972); Goodman, Y. & Goodman, K. (1990); Hall (2001); James (1998); Johnson (1996); Krashen (1989); Long (1985);
Savignon (1983); Spolsky (1974, 1988, and 1989); Tarone (1977); Taylor (1984); Taylor (1986); Taylor (1988); Terrell (1977); Widdowson (1978); and Yalden (1983) have enabled communicative approaches to become a cornerstone in the EFL, ESL, and SLA field. If you ask any FL/SL teacher about what he/she learned from the communicative approach, they would reply that it is authentic and related to students’ needs. This approach led ESL educators to suggest classroom implications that are positive and humanistic in teaching and learning (Goodman and Goodman, 1990). The communicative approach also directed educators to support more alternative ways of assessment, for example, how to use portfolios as an assessment tool.

Widdowson (1979 & 1998) also suggested we distinguish and separate socially constructed meaning from form in teaching ESL or EFL. Widdowson recommended using covertly contextualized subject matter such as newspaper headlines and reading one text that is related to the meaning of another text in information.

Hymes (1972) believed that communicative competence could be mixed with form (i.e., grammatical competence) to be appropriate to the situation. For example, an ESL teacher
may take his/her students to the post office for a live communication with the clerk to buy stamps and mail registered letters oversea. The teacher can audiotape this interaction and ask the students in groups to analyze the correct and incorrect grammatical forms, verbal cues, nonverbal cues, and other commands used in the conversation. This type of teaching method influences students to assess themselves all the time while interacting publicly, whether they assess the structure or the content used in the interaction.

Such approach led the way to authentic teaching and assessment. Authentic assessment, as an umbrella, paved the way to several techniques e.g. self-assessment and the use of portfolios as method of assessment. Foreign or second language learners learn to be self-analyzers and adjusters of the strategy or the skill they employ while using the target language.

Summary

The cited research in this chapter represents some but not all of the research in the field that has a relationship with the present research project. The summaries focused on
representing Learners Strategies Research, Reading Strategies Research that includes Vocabulary influence in reading, Assessment, Portfolios, and finally Portfolio Assessment Research that includes a discussion of validity, reliability, and the practicality of portfolio assessment was described. The next chapter discussed the methodology used to conduct case study in a Saudi context. The processes description in chapter Three is based on the theoretical framework presented in chapter Two.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of the case study was to investigate perceptions of students and educators toward the use of a self-assessment portfolio process in three EFL classes at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The researcher introduced the students to self-assessment by using a portfolio model. The case study employed mainly a qualitative approach in collecting and analyzing the research data. This chapter provides a description of the procedure used by the researcher in the present research project.

Preliminary Procedures

This researcher contacted the Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education early in 2000. By letter, the researcher explained his proposed case study and asked
permission to conduct the study in a school in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The researcher met with the Directorate of the Ministry of Education in the Eastern Administrative Region of Saudi Arabia in Spring of 2001. The researcher made an official request for permission to conduct his case study on self-assessment portfolios at an appropriate school in the Eastern Region. Permission was granted by the Directorate. The school selected by the Directorate for the study was Manarat Al-Shargiah, a private school in the Eastern Region. The Directorate chose that school because of its excellent academic performance and the willingness of its administration and instructors to experiment with new methods in education.

The researcher then visited the school and met with the superintendent to request official collaboration in using the school for the study. The project was discussed in depth, and the school’s EFL teachers were consulted to see how the case study could be implemented as part of the regular instructional process. The English teachers provided feedback that resulted in modification the research method since the teachers knew their students’ academic abilities. Changes were done to the self-assessment journal questions
and to the ways in which students would be encouraged to complete their portfolios. Both of the school’s EFL teachers had suggested that they would award five points to every student submitting a portfolio as an incentive for participation in the research. However, the researcher discouraged these teachers from assigning grades to students’ portfolios. EFL teachers disagreed with the researcher’s request and explained that students would not make efforts on behalf of extracurricular tasks, especially those tasks whose value might be questioned in the wider culture. Nonetheless, the researcher explained that the recruiting of voluntary participants was necessary to avoid biased research results.

The EFL teachers suggested that the researcher conduct the case study with second-year ELF students because first-year EFL students might not have enough English-language expertise to complete the portfolio project. Third-year EFL students were preparing for major country-wide exams and would not want to be distracted by anything that did not relate to their examinations.
Preliminary Discussions

The researcher met and oriented the EFL teachers to the benefits of using portfolio as a self-assessment method for this current research project (Appendix J). The researcher examined to the EFL teachers the theory concerning self-assessment and the advantages of having students be partially in charge of their own school work. The discussion included details about how students and teachers can work together to decide the components of the self-assessment portfolios that students would be asked to create. For example, students could select samples for their portfolio that represented their learning progress, that included article in English from a magazine they like to read. Every EFL student would be asked to attach photocopies of the textbook pages the students were discussing in their self-assessment weekly journal textbook entries. The EFL teachers were informed about the importance of students feeling that the students have partial ownership of their portfolios because the students worked to create the portfolios. The EFL teacher would only have control over the process of selecting and contributing parts to the portfolio.
Contributions from the teachers were important because the EFL teachers were those who interacted with the students daily, and the teacher could recognize the students’ strengths and weaknesses in the EFL instruction. The EFL teachers worked hand in hand with the researcher to encourage EFL students to use portfolio assessment during the researcher’s site visit. The EFL teachers were cooperative and informed the researcher when changes were made during the EFL class. The researcher suggested that it was not necessary to have the EFL students perform extra homework because the new portfolio-assessment procedure work would be requiring time from the students. If teachers had assigned extra homework, the students might have felt burdened by the portfolio assessment strategy. The researcher also did not want to cause the EFL students to hate the new portfolio-assessment procedure, particularly because it was a novel approach for most of the Saudi intermediate school participants.

Participants

The student participants were eighth-graders in the EFL classes at the Manarat Al-Shargiah intermediate school in
the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. It is a private school with an annual student tuition rate of $1,100 to $1,800, depending on the grade level in which the student is enrolled.

Manarat Al-Shargiah also is a male-only school, so all the student participants are boys. Schools in Saudi Arabia are not co-educational. Saudis follow the Islamic mandate that the two genders should not be mixed socially unless there is a religious reason. Since this researcher is male, he would only have free access to male-only schools; he would not have been able to observe and monitor the implications of self-assessment portfolios in a female-only school.

Written permission from parents allowing their children to participate in the case study was not required by the Saudi schools or government. However, in line with regulations at The Ohio State University, parent waiver forms (see appendix A) were collected to release the researcher from liability.

The participants were intermediate-school students from three EFL classes and are in their second year of EFL study; they ranged in age from 12 to 15. First-year EFL students
study letters, sounds, words, and simple sentence recognition, such as, “My name is Abdallah.” Second-year EFL students learn how to read short paragraphs, to write simple sentences, and to compose paragraphs; they also study grammar and vocabulary. The second-year EFL students also read simple texts in a supplementary book different from the main textbook readings. The main textbook, issued by the Saudi Ministry, includes comprehension exercises, grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. Each of the classes had between 23 and 30 students. The total number of student participants was 81 males in the study.

After introducing the researcher of his role in the school and distributing the Background Questionnaire Form, the self-assessment portfolios project was introduced to the students in the three classrooms. The researcher clarified that the research was not intended to grade the students, but to try a new methodology of authentic assessment, self-assessment portfolios. The students were given details on how to fill the weekly self-assessment journal and the portfolio. Then, the researcher distributed the free folders so students do not have to buy folders. The researcher intended to save time by avoiding excuses i.e. no
transportation to stationary store. However, the researcher offered the students the freedom to change the handed-in folders with any folder they like purchase.

Data Collection

After familiarizing the teachers with the procedures of the study, the researcher started collecting data using the following main sources: (1) the weekly self-assessment journal entries; (2) participants reaction papers evaluating the portfolio assessment technique; (3) the researcher’s interviews with the EFL students; (4) the researcher’s interviews with the EFL teachers; (5) the researcher’s interviews with the school principal and school EFL supervisor; (6) the researcher’s interview with the Directorate; (7) the researcher’s observations of the three EFL classes, (8) the teachers’ reactions to portfolio assessment project; (9) the researcher’s field notes; and (10) document analysis. The observations and interviews helped document student behaviors during the case study. Observations and interviews also helped to find connections between observation entries and self-assessment portfolio entries. The EFL teachers collected all the participants’
self-assessment portfolios for weekly analysis by the researcher and for evaluating students’ responses on the self-assessment journal entries at the end of the term. The teacher’s evaluation was not intended to assign student grades, but it was intended to allow feedback on student journal entries that might help students find a way to solve a problem while learning English. The EFL teachers were asked not to change their teaching methodologies or techniques besides the implementation of self-assessment portfolios during the research semester.

The EFL teachers agreed to collect the student portfolios for evaluation. The teachers were asked to make copies of the journal entries before returning the portfolio to the students. The researcher then collected the photocopied self-assessment portfolios from the teachers for analysis. This procedure took place during week nine of the sixteen week semester.

Instrumentation

In the first meeting with the participants, the researcher gave the participants open-ended questions from the Background Questionnaire Form (see Appendix E). The
questions focused on the importance of English learning strategies. Then, the researcher provided another questionnaire at the end of the semester which included the same questions as a type of pre-post procedure. The questions were straight-forward (e.g., Do you keep a diary of the new vocabulary you learn?) with additional space after every question for the participants to write their responses. The questions and directions were translated into Arabic, and the students were given the freedom to answer in Arabic. The Arabic responses were then translated into English. Students’ foreign language ability does not allow them to express complicated responses fluently in English. The researcher discussed this issue with the EFL teachers and they suggested likewise.

**Portfolio Procedures**

The student self-assessment portfolios included three parts. The first part was the self-assessment journal designed to assist participants in analyzing the processes they used to study EFL. In the weekly journal, each student was to answer several questions provided by this researcher about their weekly learning strategies. A sample
question is: I learned (please list) during the past week. A sample copy of the weekly journal is provided in Appendix B.

The EFL teachers collected the journals and submitted them to the researcher each week. Two weeks before the end of the semester, the teacher asked the EFL students to write a summary reflection paper, reacting to what they had learned from their self-assessment journal entries and the entire portfolio-assessment experience. This summary was intended to encourage participating students to frequently read and study the journal entries in their portfolios. This procedure also was intended to build a bond between the students and their portfolios by continuously reminding them of what was inside of the portfolio. Then, the EFL teachers collected all the journal entries, including the summary entry, by each student into the portfolio. Finally, the summary reflection paper written two weeks before the end of the research project was designed to provide summative data on the students’ portfolio experience written in the students’ own words. These essays were subsequently analyzed by the researcher. A sample reflection paper can be found in appendix P.
The second part of the EFL student portfolios included students’ homework and assignments arranged in chronological order of their completion. This part of the portfolio was intended to help the EFL students monitor their progress throughout the semester. The researcher gave the students the option of putting copies of the homework or assignments after every journal entry or putting the copies in a separate section of the portfolio. The participants also were free to reflect on the progress of this task in the portfolio via self-assessment journal entries and in their summary reflections.

The third part of the portfolio consisted of reading materials external to the textbook. The participants were asked to collect, photocopy, and relate these articles to a particular task. For example, if a student read a brochure about a new car model, the student could explain in the portfolio why he selected and read that particular advertisement. The students were also asked to place a copy of that advertisement in their portfolios. This procedure would help the researcher to learn the types of magazines EFL students, ages 13 to 15, enjoy reading in Saudi Arabia these days—especially since technological devices such as
Sega and the ever-expanding Internet—both of which are typically in English—are extremely popular in Saudi Arabia. Male Saudi students who are not far from driving age also are usually fond of automobiles. This strategy was intended to encourage the student to make an effort to read English advertisements instead of just browsing the pictures of these ads. The students were asked to organize these entries in their portfolios.

Group discussions would take place every four weeks during the data collection phase. In group discussions, students met in groups of four or five to present and discuss the entries they accumulated for their portfolio. In this activity, they could also see what other students had collected and written in their entries. Students were encouraged to share their viewpoints and experiences. This activity helped the students become aware of others’ efforts in the portfolio project and helped them to adjust the strategies they used in developing their own portfolios. This activity was important because it also allowed them to learn from each other. In addition, every student was encouraged to point out any portion of a portfolio he learned something from or was most influenced by during the
group meetings. Such meetings can lower the authoritarian pressure students might feel from the sometimes controlling presence of a teacher or a researcher. The first group discussion occurred four weeks after the introduction of the portfolio process to the students.

Procedures

Qualitative research can be characterized as a research method that depends on analyzing and explaining human behaviors through observations, interviews, or non-numerical data. Duffy and Early (1999) suggest that the qualitative paradigm helps researchers in describing tangible observations and to form explanations with “multiple realities” instead of just presenting factual statistics of a certain observation (p. 6).

The authors also indicate that the qualitative research paradigm does not eliminate variables of human behavior that influence the research field and its results. In addition, the researcher’s role in the field of data collection may influence the results that should be accounted for in any research (Lather, 1991). For example, the researcher could inadvertently affect the personalities or the behaviors of
the informants (i.e., subjects of the research) while interviewing, observing, teaching, and recommending suggestions that help in the collection of the data but impact the outcome of the study.

As a result, the qualitative-research paradigm requires an effort that might involve time to code, categorize, analyze, and interpret thousands of pages of data. Finally, the researcher will explore the corpora to find out if the frequencies are significant to generate tables (Erickson, 1992).

With the advancement of technology in research methodologies, Qualitative Solutions and Research International has launched a somewhat new software package called QSR Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing (NUD*IST). NUD*IST software helps researchers to generate and manage large amounts of data to search and explore within textual contexts for patterns and explore those patterns into labeled findings. The text may include data that are scattered over thousands of pages, which includes observations, interviews, and journal entries. The software also helps the researcher to find relationships or patterns in the data that are being coded
and finally to interpret those patterns. The software will help the researcher to code the data and display it to search for similarities, to modify coded entries, and to establish a tree of codes that are grouped in the way the researcher needs. The researcher can then look for codings and can access texts tied to those codings. The coding of data will help the researcher to construct a ground of data explanations. This process helps the researcher to locate patterns or relate those patterns to the research assumptions (see Appendix 2 for NUD*IST Coding Sample).

This researcher used NUD*IST software to code and construct explanations of the collected data. Nonetheless, no data can be collected without permission from the individuals in charge of educational setting in Saudi Arabia. All the participants were assigned a number and pseudo-names to maintain student confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis attempted to explore the data’s three main concerns: (1) coded student portfolios nodes; 2) coded student interviews nodes; 3) and a comparison of the above two coded nodes with coded nodes from interviews conducted
with the EFL program supervisor, the school principal, and the Ministry of Education Directorate. After the data were collected from the student participants and the EFL teachers, the researcher performed two levels of examination, initial and deep examination. The initial examination looked for patterns and information to determine if all participants provided answers to every question for the ten journals and if the portfolios were complete. The researcher then typed the journal entries into the NUD*IST software package for coding. Coding assisted in analyzing data and finding patterns of used strategies among students. The coding formed nodes and trees that the researcher established from the data the students provided. For example, if a student wrote that he and other students found it difficult to read a certain reading text, this comment would be coded as a reading difficulty. A tree of categories and nodes could be established if more than one topic was described as being difficult to read.

The codes were established after observing some patterns in the students’ self-assessment journal entries. After coding the data, the researcher clustered the findings into patterns and groups (e.g., weakness verification,
strength verification, reported reading strategies, or student comments about the self-assessment portfolio experience). A second researcher hired by the primary researcher will randomly verify selected categories as a reliability check. Kvale (1996) suggests that there is no set criteria for evaluating qualitative data, which creates a demand for a method that focus on reliability. However, the author did not recommend establishing validity techniques in data analysis. Validity forms an important element in quantitative research, which may be required due to the small extent of cross-sectionally-collected data. On the other hand, qualitatively-collected research data may exceed a thousand pages of interview notes that have been recorded and transcribed. The rich information leads to the lack of standard techniques to analyze qualitative research’s collected data. It is designed to provide descriptive data.

The last part of the deep analysis focused on the participating students’ final reaction paper that summarized and evaluated the entire portfolio-approach. The participants’ feedback informed the researcher about participants’ attitudes towards assessing their learning.
strategies and their achievement (Green, 1998). This analysis contributed to the researcher’s argument that self-assessment portfolios can have a positive impact on EFL students learning.

Summary

This case study investigates the reactions of Saudi EFL students toward self-assessment portfolios. The methodology chapter has described how the data were collected and analyzed qualitative research methodology. This current research project involved collecting the data with qualitative procedures, so the researcher cannot generalize findings students across Saudi Arabia. Instead the case study described what was found at a single research site. The current research project was designed to identify possible connections between categories and nodes in the typed and saved data using NUD*IST software. Computerized data analysis helped the researcher identify important aspects of the collected data. The chapter also included a discussion of the data. The next chapter presents the data along with appropriate discussion of it.
CHAPTER 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine perceptions of students and educators toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in three English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The case study approach allowed this researcher to examine student and educator reactions to the introduction of an innovative type of student assessment that had not been used previously in the school’s EFL curriculum.

Self-assessment portfolios were designed to enable students to become aware of both successful and unsuccessful strategies they had applied in learning English. EFL students were asked to use self-assessment portfolios as part of their EFL classes during the 16-week Spring, 2001 semester (a sample portfolio is included in Appendix P). As part of the self-assessment portfolio approach, students
were also encouraged to complete weekly learning progress journals to reflect on their individual learning process. In addition to weekly learning progress journals, self-assessment portfolios contained the following: a background questionnaire; a parental permission form granting permission to participate in the research project; classroom handouts and assignments; a student summary of the self-assessment experience; and any other item or items the student wanted to include in the portfolio.

Zaid (1993) analyzed the current understanding of teaching English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabian intermediate schools using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and including interviews with both teachers and administrators/officials. The present case study employed a qualitative approach for data collection and analysis. Data collected in the present study included the following: (1) EFL students’ self-assessment portfolios; (2) interviews with EFL students; (3) interviews with EFL teachers; (4) interviews with Saudi school administrators; and (5) the researcher’s field notes. (Field observations are interspersed throughout this chapter in relevant
This chapter presents a discussion of the data analysis. Six research questions guided this case study. The questions were as follows:

1) What are the perceptions of EFL students at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School toward self-assessment portfolios?

2) Do students perceive self-assessment portfolios as helping them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in EFL learning?

3) What are the perceptions of EFL teachers at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL learning?

4) What are the perceptions of selected education administrators in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL learning?

5) What changes might be required in order to further implement the use of self-assessment portfolios at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School and other schools in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia?
6) What preliminary implications can be drawn about the introduction of a non-indigenous (Western) instructional strategy (self-assessment portfolios) into a Saudi Arabian (Islamic) intermediate school?

Student Data

Data were collected from all second-year students (N = 81) attending the three EFL classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School, where EFL is a required course. All students were male, as the Islamic tradition requires the segregation of students by gender—schools are attended by either boys or girls, but not both. Student data were collected in two ways: a) through student interviews conducted by the researcher, and b) via examination of students’ self-assessment portfolios.

Self-Assessment Portfolios

Of the 81 students participating in this study, 43 (53%) submitted self-assessment portfolios. Thirty-eight students (47%) did not submit portfolios—although a number of these students indicated in interviews that they thought portfolios would be helpful in identifying strengths and
weakness in their learning. (This moderate rate of participation is further explained in several sections below.) The table below provides details related to portfolio completion, portfolio type, and student interviews. The last row of the table summarizes the data into frequency statistics.

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<th>Names</th>
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<th>Acceptable &amp; Unacceptable</th>
<th>Creative Not creative</th>
<th>Interviewed Y/N</th>
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N=81 Students  
Class A=13 portfolios  
Class B=11 portfolios  
Class C=19 portfolios  
43 Portfolios  
33 Accepted  
10 Unaccepted  
8 creative  
25 Not-creative  
29 Interviewees
This table contains eight columns: the first column numbers the students sequentially; the second column lists codes corresponding to students’ identity, which was kept confidential; the third column indicates which of three EFL classes each student attended; the fourth column contains three pseudonyms used to refer to three students who are discussed in detail later in this chapter; the fifth column indicates whether or not students submitted their portfolios; the sixth column indicates whether or not submitted portfolios were accepted; the seventh column indicates whether or not students’ portfolios were creative; and the eighth column indicates whether or not students were interviewed (students were selected for interviews on a random basis). Thirteen (30%) of the 43 portfolios submitted were obtained from Class A (taught by EFL Teacher A). None of those portfolios were considered to be complete, thus, none were considered to be creative. Eleven portfolios (25%) were obtained from Class B (taught by EFL Teacher B). Two of these portfolios were considered to be both complete and creative. Finally, 20 portfolios (46%) were obtained from Class C (also taught by Teacher B). Six of these portfolios were considered to be both complete and creative.
The researcher provided students with clear plastic folders in which to hold their portfolios during the first meeting. The researcher also provided a list of questions that students could use as a guide for completing the weekly learning progress journals. If students’ learning progress entries concerned a specific lesson or homework assignment, students were encouraged to include a copy of the lesson or homework assignment with the journal entry. Many students cooperated with the request and included such copies.

Student portfolios were categorized by this researcher and another knowledgeable rater in terms of completeness and creativity. The researcher and the rater categorized a portfolio as “complete” if the student provided a minimum of five weekly-learning journals in addition to classroom assignments and complete questionnaires. The number of learning journals required for “complete” portfolios was arbitrary; the researcher chose this number because he was at the school for five weeks during the study’s data-collection phase. Portfolios were categorized as “partially complete” if they contained three or four weekly learning journals. Portfolios containing two or less weekly learning journals were categorized as “incomplete.”
Complete portfolios were categorized as “creative” if they contained an artistic presentation or some evidence of creative thinking or initiative, for example, the inclusion of an English piece the student had read or used for the class outside the textbook. For example, one student included artistic dividers between each weekly learning journal and also suggested that extra practice of those activities he liked (e.g., some of the puzzles provided in the textbook) might enhance his learning. (This student later indicated that he did not learn much in EFL class because the curriculum does not challenge him. However, his portfolio indicated that he was able to think of ways to challenge himself and thus supplement the curriculum.) Of the 43 submitted portfolios, eight portfolios (18%) were “complete” (most of these portfolios were also “creative”), 25 (58%) were “partially complete,” and 10 (23%) were “incomplete.”

Six students’ portfolios included a final reaction paper. Three of these six students wrote their responses in an essay format as requested. One student “wrote” his paper with pictures and paintings and also used humor to explain why certain items were difficult for him. The two remaining
students wrote short answers on the list of sample questions the researcher had provided as a guide for completing the weekly learning journals. (One student wrote that he liked the portfolio experience, but that he would rather take tests because the self-assessment portfolio demanded a lot of time and effort from him.)

The following three sections examine the portfolio choices of three students, Sami, Khalid, and Adel. Students’ names have been fictionalized to maintain student confidentiality. This researcher premised anonymity to participants in order to encourage open and frank responses.

**Sami: A Complete and Creative Portfolio**

To hold his portfolio entries, Sami used his own special notebook—a notebook that pictured the planet Earth and was emblazoned with the English words, “New Millennium.” The inside covers of the notebook were also in English and featured a Westernized calendar, a thermometer with Fahrenheit/Celsius equivalents, and metric equivalents of American measurements.

Sami had used his computer to print out 16 pages of color graphics which were interspersed throughout his
portfolio. All graphics used the English language. The word "Welcome" was printed on the first page of the portfolio, and the second page depicted a Sherlock Holmes-type figure using a magnifying glass. The researcher would like to think that this graphic implied the student was “taking a closer look” at the learning of English.

Page two also included the student’s name and the fact that he is in the “eighth grade.” This latter information is interesting in that the Saudi school system does not refer to an eighth grade. Instead, it would be said that Sami is a second-year student in intermediate school. The student’s inclusion of the American term “eighth grade” indicates that he has probably spent some of his free time either reading or speaking to others about schools in the United States.

Sami’s background questionnaire indicated that his father, an engineer, knows English and graduated from a college in the United States.

Sami’s portfolio included 12 weekly learning journals; each journal was introduced by a different color graphic. The student also included color photocopies of the pages from his textbook that related to his journal entries.
questionnaire, parental waiver form, and project evaluation form. The last computer graphic in his portfolio was a humorous depiction of a man lugging a huge portfolio filled with papers. Sami’s portfolio also included a note to the researcher, thanking him for “trying to find solutions to ease the suffering of students in EFL classes.”

In his first weekly learning journal, Sami wrote only in Arabic. In the following learning journals, he used both English and Arabic. For the most part, Sami’s comments in his weekly journals revolved around his desire that the school’s EFL classes be divided into levels according to students’ proficiency in English. Sami complained that he and the other “good” English students were being held back by students who were struggling with the subject. In answering the journal question concerning what he had learned the previous week, Sami’s answer was “nothing new” or “nothing worthwhile.”

Sami wrote that he enjoyed grammar and learning new vocabulary. In summing up the self-assessment experience, Sami wrote, “If I assess myself, I will know my weaknesses. If my teacher assesses me, he will know my weaknesses and can help me overcome them.”
Khalid: An Incomplete Portfolio

To hold his portfolio, Khalid used the plain, clear plastic folder provided by this researcher. Khalid’s portfolio contained a completed background questionnaire, parental waiver form, and project evaluation form, along with two completed weekly learning journals. Other weekly journals were included in the portfolio, but they were not filled out. The portfolio also contained two pages from the text’s workbook that related to his journal entries—but these pages, instead of being photocopied, had been ripped out of the workbook. Although the weekly learning journals had been hole-punched, Khalid did not insert his papers into the folder’s clasps; instead, he left the papers loose in the folder—the papers frequently would fall out and have to be gathered up.

Khalid, who indicated that his father knows English, was one of the students the researcher interviewed. Khalid expressed some hostility toward the researcher and toward school in general during the interview. His teacher told the researcher that Khalid rarely does his homework; in fact, he generally refuses even to take his textbooks to class.
Khalid told the researcher that he likes to sit at the back of the class with others who talk amongst themselves, pass notes, and sneak in candy to eat.

Khalid told the researcher that he spends 15 minutes a day on his EFL homework. Khalid also stated that he has developed an effective way to cheat on EFL tests. When the students pass their tests to the teacher, Khalid withholds a test taken by a proficient student. Then he asks the teacher if a certain recitation passage can be repeated. While the teacher repeats the passage, Khalid copies down the answers on the proficient student’s test.

Khalid stated that English does not make much sense to him. He explained that he has difficulty putting the alphabet’s letters together and “can’t read the letters as I see them.” This researcher interpreted these statements as being in reference to the fact that Arabic is read from right to left, while English is read from left to right.

While Khalid has difficulty learning English, he nonetheless stated that he saw no reason to complete a self-assessment portfolio as it was irrelevant to his grade and would not help him get into the university. He later told
the researcher that going to college was stupid since there were no jobs for college graduates.

As stated above, Khalid did complete two weekly journal entries along with accompanying homework assignments. The first entry discussed the difficulty he had learning tenses, especially the present tense. Khalid listed the words “do” and “does” as examples of words he does not like. He wrote that he had “learned nothing” in this journal entry, yet he also wrote (in the same entry): “I did not learn the tenses until I practiced a lot and paid attention to the teacher in class. I tried, and I persisted.” Finally, Khalid’s first journal entry contained the statement that it would be beneficial if he “asked for help depending on the problem.”

Khalid’s second weekly learning journal concerned a cloze exercise from the text’s workbook in which students were asked to fill in the blanks in a conversational paragraph about a village that had grown and become a crowded city with lots of cars and people. Khalid wrote that he liked this exercise because it was about “real life.” He wrote that it was difficult to use the new vocabulary, but that he particularly liked two of the new words in the conversation, “village” and “quieter.” The student added
that he did not like the word “noisier” (which he misspelled). Khalid wrote that one way to overcome the difficulty of the lesson was “to practice and try to use the words more often.” He stated that he learned a new skill from the lesson--how to complete a conversation.

In summing up the self-assessment experience, Khalid emphasized the importance of asking for help when one is having difficulty with a lesson.

**Adel: No Portfolio**

Adel indicated that he would not be creating a portfolio during his interview with the researcher. The researcher then began to generate questions that might identify the student’s difficulty with the portfolio process. The discussion with Adel revealed that he had problems with self-esteem, comprehension, and concentration. Adel indicated that he finds it difficult to focus, even for only a few minutes. When the researcher asked Adel whether he understood how to complete the weekly self-assessment journals, Adel replied, “I do--but not exactly.” The following is an excerpt from their conversation:
Researcher: Do you have the patience to do homework?
Adel: Hmmmm. I hate writing, and I hate English.

Researcher: Why?
Adel: I don’t know, but I feel I don’t care when I open the book. And, I don’t care what the questions are in the textbook. Ever since the beginning of the year, I have not paid attention to what’s going on.

Researcher: Is this true only for English class?
Adel: Yes.

The researcher asked Adel about his father’s opinion of the English language during the interview. Adel reported that his father hates English because it represents the United States; Adel’s father disagrees with the United States’ stand on Palestinian issues.

Researcher: Why does your dad hate English?
Adel: He hates English and Americans when he watches the news.

Researcher: Does this affect your learning of English?
Adel: Yes. Even when I was young I used to hate it, and God did not make me love it.

Researcher: Did you try to put in more effort, but you still did not succeed?
Adel: No. I feel every time I try to like it, I get further away, since I hate it.

Adel’s father’s attitude toward English may provide some explanation for the resistance Adel showed in his EFL classes: Adel stated that he hates learning English because
his parents are politically opposed to the U.S. policy regarding the Palestinians. In addition, Adel’s response to why he hates the English language indicates that it was not his will to quit learning English, but it is god’s will which did not inspire him love it. Such response is a typical surrender to god when he could not find solutions. Moreover, the majority of Saudis use this term to explain the reason for a weakness instead of analyzing and solving any problem.

In further discussion with Adel, the researcher learned that while Adel was confused and hindered by his parents’ politics, he understood how important it is to learn the English language:

**Researcher:** Do you think English is important or beneficial?  
**Adel:** I feel it is, but I don’t care about it.

Adel realized that learning the English language was important for his future, yet he stated that failure to complete his EFL homework is not a problem for him, since his parents would not punish him for getting poor grades in EFL class.
Adel also indicated that his difficulty with English is due in part to the fact that he does not pay attention in the EFL classroom. This student told the researcher that another reason he does poorly in English is that he sits in the back of the class with other students who are considered “lazy” or “challenged”:

**Researcher:** What makes you go far away from your EFL assignments?
**Adel:** I get busy with my classmates, playing. I sit in the back. All of the students who sit in the back don’t like English.

**Researcher:** What else do you do in the back?
**Adel:** We laugh, play, and eat snacks in the back.

**Researcher:** Why do you like to sit in the back?
**Adel:** Well, I love sitting with my friends and having fun with them, and I have been sitting there for a long time. I don’t remember that I have ever sat in the front.

**Researcher:** Is it beneficial for you to sit in the back?
**Adel:** No. I sense difficulties when I sit in the back, and I don’t get to follow the teachers.

Adel seemed to understand the effect of his choice to sit in the back of the class. He realized that sitting in the back interferes with his English learning. Nevertheless, he is in the habit of having fun with his friends rather than concentrating on English.
Moreover, Adel indicated that when he does make an effort to listen to the teacher or engage in class activities, his friends in the back of the class respond with attempts to engage him in their games. Adel reported that he felt pulled by peer pressure to continue to sit in the back of the class. While he acknowledged that sitting with his friends was detrimental to learning, he still chose to do so.

Adel’s interview points to the importance of parents’ and peers’ influence on student learning in the EFL classroom. Data also supported the notion that students play a role in each other’s performance: Almost all of the students who sat in the back of the class either did not submit portfolios or turned in portfolios that were incomplete.

The three portfolio choices described in this section indicated that students responded honestly and willingly voiced their opinions. Moreover, students’ responses indicated that the three participants were capable of analyzing their own performance in EFL classes, regardless of whether they engaged in the self-assessment portfolio
process. The section below discusses the findings obtained from student interviews.

**Student Interviews**

Twenty-nine EFL students were interviewed by this researcher, who randomly chose interviewees by selecting every third name from the three EFL teachers' student rosters. Of these 29 interviewees, 26 were native Saudis and three were native Egyptians whose families had moved to Saudi Arabia. The interviews were conducted in Arabic and took place in the office of the school’s educational sociologist. The sociologist was not present during the interviews. Students appeared to be nervous each time they were taken to the interview site, although no one refused to participate. The section below provides a full interview transcript in order to illustrate the researcher’s interview process:

**Full interview sample**

**Student Name:** Adel .......  Age: 15  Class: 2B

Date:  5/ 21 /01      Time: 10:20 AM
**Introduction:**

**Researcher:** Good morning. How are you doing?  
**Adel:** Alhamdu le Allah [thanks to God], fine.

**Researcher:** How is it going with the portfolio?  
**Adel:** Good.

**Researcher:** Are you planning to submit your portfolio?  
**Adel:** No.

[As soon as the researcher learned that this student was not planning to submit the portfolio, he began to ask probing questions in order to learn more about the student’s personality.]

**Researcher:** Do you watch TV?  
**Adel:** Yes.

**Researcher:** Do you watch it during the weekdays?  
**Adel:** Yes, for 30 minutes to an hour.

**Researcher:** What about weekends and holidays?  
**Adel:** Not much.

**Researcher:** If you had to choose between watching TV or studying, what would you choose?  
**Adel:** I would choose studying because I’m a grown up and I know what benefits me.

**Researcher:** Do you know what you want to be when you grow up?  
**Adel:** No, I don’t.

**Researcher:** Why not?  
**Adel:** I don’t know. When I grow I will think about it.

**Researcher:** can you think now of what you are going to do when you grow up?  
**Adel:** When I start and finish the undergraduate degree, I will decide because I cannot think of anything now.
Researcher: Has anyone asked you before what you want to be?
Adel: Yes, my dad. I said I will think about it when I grow up.

Researcher: Did you enjoy using the portfolio?
Adel: Honestly not. The people in my shoes will not [want the portfolio to be part of the curriculum] because our situation is bad.

[At this point in the interview, the researcher stopped asking predetermined questions and began to focus instead on the student’s attitudes towards EFL and on his personal lifestyle.]

Researcher: What situation?
Adel: I don’t follow the teacher in some classes.

Researcher: So does this [portfolio] process force you to focus in classes?
Adel: Well, yes. But for some lessons I don’t open the book. I don’t care about them.

Researcher: How many forms did you do?
Adel: Honestly, none.

Researcher: Did you read the questions and understand them?
Adel: Yes, I did.

Researcher: Honestly, why do you not want to do it [the portfolio], yet you have time?
Adel: Because it’s not important.

Researcher: If your teachers say the portfolio will be graded, will you do it?
Adel: I will try.
Researcher: Now, with this situation you’re in, are you able to do it?
Adel: Now, with my situation, I cannot--honestly.

Researcher: Do you have the patience to do homework?
Adel: Hmm, I hate writing and I hate English. I don’t like it.

Researcher: Why?
Adel: I don’t know, but I feel I don’t care when I open the book. I don’t care what’s in the textbook or what the questions are. Ever since the beginning of the year, I did not pay attention to what’s going on.

Researcher: Is this true only for English?
Adel: Yes.

Researcher: Does your dad work?
Adel: Yes, at the court as a notary public [in Saudi, notary publics are only available at the court who may also be court clerks (sheiks) who in turn must have a degree in the Islamic religion], and he does not speak or understand English.

Researcher: Does your dad hate English-speaking people, such as Americans?
Adel: Yes, he hates them when he watches the news.

Researcher: Does this affect your level in English?
Adel: Yes, but even when I was young, I used to hate it and God did not make me love it.

Researcher: Is this because of your dad, or is it just you?
Adel: Well, my dad does not believe in the importance of English at all and he does not teach us English at all.

Researcher: Did you tell him about your problems in English?
Adel: No, I didn’t. If I tell him anything about problems at school, he says to go to the teachers and listen to what they say in class, or ask the other students.
Researcher: In English classes?
Adel: In English classes or other classes.

Researcher: Do you think English is important or beneficial?
Adel: I feel it is, but I don’t care about it.

Researcher: Did you try to put more effort in class, but still you did not succeed?
No. Every time I try to like it, I get further away, since I hate it.

Researcher: What make you go so far away from it?
Adel: I get busy with the other classmates, playing.

Researcher: Do you feel it is more important to be with the students who like English or with the students who hate English?
Adel: I sit in the back. All of the students who sit in the back don’t like English.

Researcher: What else do you do in the back?
Adel: We laugh, play, and eat snacks in the back. [Eating is prohibited in classrooms.]

Researcher: Why do you like to sit in the back?
Adel: Well, I love sitting with my friends. I have fun with the other men...and I have been sitting there for a long time. I don’t remember that I have ever sat in the front.

Researcher: Is it beneficial for you to sit in the back?
Adel: No, I sense difficulties when I sit in the back and I don’t get to follow the teachers.

Researcher: How long do you follow the teachers?
Adel: Not much, about a minute or so.

Researcher: Does the English teacher care about that?
Adel: Yes, he cares and sometimes he confuses us by making us stand up and so on.
Researcher: Do wish to change your personality?
Adel: Yes.

Researcher: Did you try to do so?
Adel: No, I did not.

Researcher: Do you know how to change yourself?
Adel: No. I wanted to, but I feel I cannot.

Researcher: Do you feel your dad supports you with everything you need?
Adel: Yes, he gives me everything I want and he never did so before.

Researcher: Do you love your dad or your mom best? If you had to choose between them, which parent would you choose?
Adel: I could not choose between them, but if I had to choose then I would choose my mom.

Researcher: What is your level in religion?
Adel: Thanks to God, I pray.

Researcher: No, I mean in your four religion classes?
Adel: Oh, thanks to God, the level is OK, but the grades are a bit low.

Researcher: Even though your dad is a sheik in the court [again, court clerks must hold a degree in Islamic studies] and your mom is a religion teacher?
Adel: Yes, even though.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?
Adel: I guess sitting in the back makes me not understand what the teacher says. It makes me not pay attention to what is said in the class. And every time I want to go near the front, I feel something pulls me back.

Researcher: Do the students in the back pull you?
Adel: No, I myself feel I cannot go to the front. Once I sit in the front for two days or so, I go back to the back of the class.
**Researcher**: So what do you think the problem is in your performance at school?
**Adel**: I guess it is sitting in the back.

**Researcher**: What do you like more, tests or projects?
**Adel**: I like projects more because I get tired fast from tests and get bored fast from studying. When I sit focused, I get bored fast and lose concentration fast.

**Researcher**: What about when you study alone?
**Adel**: No, when I study alone I don’t lose concentration fast.

**Researcher**: Do you wish to say anything else?
**Adel**: No.

**Researcher**: If I ask you to speak about any subject for a minute, can you do that?
**Adel**: One minute?
**Researcher**: Yes.
**Adel**: [After a 20-second pause] I don’t know.

**Researcher**: Tell me about prayers and their benefits. [At this point, Adel began to recite verses from the Koran (peace be upon prophet Muhammad’s soul) as if he were reading from the book.]

**Researcher**: No, don’t recite, tell me what you understand. [Adel could not say more than a few words in response to this question.]

Closing questions:

**Researcher**: Does your Mom work?
**Adel**: Yes, as a religion teacher.

**Researcher**: Do your parents read to you?
**Adel**: No.

**Researcher**: Do you see your parents read at home?
**Adel**: Sometimes they read magazines or the Koran.

**Researcher**: Do you read anything besides schoolwork?
**Adel**: No.
Researcher: Have you ever borrowed books from the school?
Adel: No, since nobody told me to do so for school.

Researcher Comments: It was obvious that this student’s poor performance in EFL has not been attended to by the school, his EFL teacher, or his family. The student needs more evaluation by an educational psychologist to determine whether he is troubled with ADD/ADHD.

The researcher chose to illustrate his interview process with the above interview transcript both because this transcript shows the connection between religious background and poor EFL performance and because it demonstrates the researcher’s response when structured interview questions could not be answered (i.e., because students did not participate in the portfolio process). When students did not submit portfolios, the researcher tried to solicit information about their attitudes toward EFL in particular and school in general.

As the above interview transcript indicates, the researcher attempted to break the ice by asking students
“warm-up” questions before addressing their self-assessment portfolio experience. Once these initial warm-up questions were completed, the researcher asked specific questions about the portfolio project (see Appendix A for a list of structured interview questions). Responses to each of the nine interview questions are discussed below.

**Question #1**
Did you enjoy using the self-assessment portfolio?

Twenty-two students (76%) responded that they enjoyed using self-assessment portfolios. A majority of these students indicated that they enjoyed portfolios because portfolios are less stressful than tests and allow for communication with the teacher. Three students reported that, while they enjoyed the portfolio process and found it to be easier than taking tests, they preferred the testing process because they lacked confidence in their ability to engage in self-assessment. The following comment is typical of students who enjoyed preparing their self-assessment portfolios:

**Hill:** It’s good if it could make me concentrate. For example, if I missed something, I could go back and
review it to remember it more than before. This process also helps me to remember what I have covered before.

One of the reasons Hill reported enjoyed using the self-assessment portfolio was that the portfolio allowed him to review material and seek the correct answers to questions he had previously answered incorrectly. Correcting mistakes could not be done in the context of regular testing, where students’ answers cannot be changed. Hill also indicated that he appreciated how the portfolio allowed him to learn according to his own pace. Nonetheless, Hill preferred the traditional testing process to the self-assessment portfolio approach because he felt unable to monitor his own learning:

**Hill:** For me, I prefer to have someone to assess me because they see things that I don’t see. Tests sometimes are better because they make me study continuously and they make the teacher see my level of performance. However, portfolios may not force students to be honest in answering these questions and students may not go back and study as they do with tests.

Hill suggested that his teachers are better able to assess his academic performance than he is. He also suggested that students may not use the portfolio to enhance their learning, presumably because the portfolios were not graded in this study. One implication of Hill’s comments
were that Hill preferred memorization and rote learning to
critical thinking. Again, however, the students who
preferred the testing process were in the minority.

Other students indicated that they enjoyed working on
their weekly learning journals once they had finished their
homework. Osam, for example, worked on his self-assessment
portfolio after completing his schoolwork because his mom
instructed him to do so—she considered schoolwork the
priority.

Osam: It was not too bad because my mom told me not to.
She told me to do my homework, and then do this
[portfolio] because the tests are soon and I want to be
in the honor roll this year.
Researcher: Did you like using it?
Osam: Yes.
Researcher: Why?
Osam: So I benefit from your research.

Osam’s parents’ priorities suggested to Osam that memorizing
the material presented in class and doing homework was more
important than the self-assessment portfolio process. Osam
informed the researcher that he is used to memorizing and
reciting without questioning whether the material makes
sense to him. His EFL teacher considered him one of the
best students.
Osam’s interview indicated that Osam’s mom monitors his homework and does not allow Osam to avoid school projects he does not enjoy. Moreover, she did praise the self-assessment portfolio project--she did tell Osam that the portfolio was a good exercise. Consequently, Osam submitted a complete portfolio.

Of those seven students (16%) who reported that they did not enjoy the self-assessment portfolio project, some explained that the reason they disliked completing portfolios was because they did not like to study English. Some reported that it is difficult for them to learn EFL, while others indicated that they prefer not to learn the language of a non-Islamic country such as the United States. Other students disliked the portfolio process because they felt the portfolio had no bearing on their grades in EFL class. The following comment is typical of these students:

Alt: No, I do not like self-assessment portfolios because I feel the project will not benefit me at all, whether I do it or not, it is the same.

Alt thought it was unnecessary to complete the weekly learning journals because he assumed they would not help him progress in EFL class. When the researcher asked him why
felt this way, Alt. responded, “It will not suit the teacher, so why do I need to do it?” This comment suggests that Alt. seemed pessimistic about making any effort in the EFL classroom. As he also reported to the researcher that he rarely submits homework and performs as little as possible, the researcher believes that Alt.’s refusal to participate in the portfolio project was due to a broader reluctance to participate in EFL class, regardless of whether activities were graded. Later, the researcher encouraged Alt. to make the effort to complete his portfolio, telling him that the portfolio would only be evaluated by the researcher and that no portfolio would be rejected.

**Question #2**

*What did you understand to be the objectives of the portfolio process?*

Twenty students (69%) reported that they understood at least one objective of the self-assessment portfolio process, making reference to how the portfolio helps them learn. Students also recognized that portfolios can help them understand their learning weaknesses. One student
reported that he understood the general objectives of the self-assessment portfolio, but this student was unable to pinpoint a specific objective.

Alde pointed to an objective of the self-assessment portfolio process as he provided an example of the way he completed his weekly learning journals:

**Alde:** *Your project made me answer truthfully. I also feel people want my opinion. I liked writing in the journal, and it was fun, but it kept me away from homework.*

While the ability to answer questions honestly and the sharing of one’s opinions are not the main objectives of the self-assessment portfolio process, Alde’s comments highlight the importance of frankness to self-assessment. On the other hand, Alde also suggested that the self-assessment portfolio was irrelevant to schoolwork. Because the portfolio assignment was voluntary and not graded, some students felt that it wasted time they could have spent completing their homework assignments, which include the incentive of grades. Later in the interview, Alde stated that he preferred the weekly learning journals to his homework.
Nine students (31%) did not seem to understand any of the self-assessment portfolio’s objectives, least of all the main objectives, that is, the identification of one’s difficulties in the learning of EFL and the development of autonomous learning skills. A majority of these students reversed the question, asking the researcher to explain what the main objectives of the self-assessment portfolio are. Some students indicated they understood the objective of the project was simply to help the researcher complete his research. The researcher learned later that students had been informed by the EFL teacher that the portfolio project was a requirement of his doctoral studies.

Another student answered the question as to whether he understood the objective of the self-assessment portfolio as follows:

**Alib:** I understood that this process might change and improve the curriculum.

Like Alib, some students thought that the main objective of the self-assessment portfolio project was to revise the existing EFL curriculum. Such an understanding may be explained by the fact that one or more EFL teachers had
announced to students that the portfolio project would assist the Ministry of Education in revising the EFL textbook. At least one teacher had intentionally told students of the potential for the project to be used by the Ministry in order to encourage the participation of those students who complained about the textbook.

Finally, one student answered the question as to whether he understood the objective of the self-assessment portfolio with the comment that he understood specific questions posed in the portfolio assignment:

**Alho:** *I understood everything in the questions. I also understood how to answer WH questions. This is what I was thinking of.*

When the researcher asked Alho to elaborate on his response, Alho replied that he had learned how to spend productive time searching for answers to questions. Since developing the ability to conduct research is not one of the self-assessment portfolio’s objectives, the researcher concluded that this student failed to understand the portfolio’s purpose. When the researcher asked Alho’s teacher about his EFL performance, the teacher indicated that the student was not doing well in the class.
Question #3

What did you learn during the self-assessment process?

Fifteen students (52%) were able to provide one or more examples of what they learned from the self-assessment process. Nearly all of these students reported that they had learned how to recognize and describe a difficulty they encountered while studying English. For example, one student learned that when he did not understand something, he should write it down in his portfolio so that he could ask the teacher about it later.

Alkh: Vocabulary knowledge is important to understand the lesson. Some words are related to the lesson and hinder the understanding. When I write the difficult items after the lesson immediately and review it with the teacher. The teacher then will come to me and explains those difficult items.

As this excerpt suggests, Alkh emphasized vocabulary as a difficult aspect of EFL learning, indicating that when he makes note of difficult words in his weekly learning journals, his teacher can then explain the words’ meaning to him. Thus, the self-assessment portfolio process served its purpose with this student, who was not only able to report
challenges he faced in the learning of EFL; Alkh was also able to determine a strategy to help him overcome these challenges. On the other hand, Alkh did not seem to learn how to tackle difficult vocabulary himself – rather, he relied on his teacher.

It is possible that students were genuine in their reports that the portfolio process taught them to identify the challenges they faced in their study of EFL. However, it should be noted that when their teachers explained the self-assessment portfolio process to students, the teachers described the process as a way for students to become cognizant of their learning difficulties. Thus, it is possible the students' responses to Interview Question three were merely repetitions of their teachers' explanations of the project.

Fourteen students (48%) were not able to describe what they had learned from the self-assessment portfolio process. The following excerpt illustrates a typical response from those who could not describe what they learned:

Alha: Honestly I did not understand anything. The people in my shoes will not like it in school because we our situation is bad.
This student indicated that he disliked self-assessment portfolios because he is not doing well in his EFL class. He believed that he is especially challenged with learning EFL and that nothing he does will help him learn the target language. Moreover, he referred to himself as not being alone, but rather as part of a group that is not doing well in school, and he suggested that the portfolio project did not address this group’s needs.

A question that has been left unanswered by this study is whether or not some students actually learned nothing through the portfolio process. It is possible that these students were simply unable to describe any learning outcomes even in their first language (Arabic).

**Question #4**

*Was the self-assessment portfolio project exhausting for you?*

Fifteen students (52%) responded that it was exhausting to create a self-assessment portfolio. Nine of those students (31%) reported that the project was definitely exhausting and six students (21%) reported the project was
somewhat exhausting. Fourteen students (48%) reported that the project was not exhausting for them.

The 15 students who found the project exhausting said that they had to work on the portfolio almost every day—something they were not used to doing. Some students compared the portfolios to the long end-of-semester exams for which they had to study continuously during the last two weeks of the semester. One participant, an excellent student who puts a lot of effort into his schoolwork, indicated that the project was so time consuming it conflicted with other obligations.

Ahmad: Writing the portfolios during the week is very time consuming and I have to take care of my two-year-old brother. This portfolio does not let me have time for my brother and other responsibilities.

Another participant who found the portfolio project exhausting was a student who does not typically submit homework to any of his teachers. He suggested that the project challenged him:

Alje: Yes, why, because I had to go Xerox and do a lot of things and I have to read and write things I cannot do so as to answer the questions.
This student’s academic performance was so poor that his EFL teacher stopped all efforts to assess his learning. The teacher informed the researcher that Alje. rarely brought his textbook to class. One of the student’s other teachers (his Arabic teacher) told the researcher that Alje never completed homework and had failed to advance to the next grade – he was repeating last year’s curriculum. However, this student was enthusiastic about the portfolio project from the first. In fact, he tried to submit his portfolio during the first week of the project’s implementation. As the excerpt above shows, he found the project both exhausting (he spent time and effort to complete it) and challenging. That Alje used the portfolio to address difficult material suggests he understood the tool’s main objective—to identify challenges in the learning of EFL. Alje’s choice to utilize the portfolio process, when viewed in light of his poor academic performance, also suggests that for him, the portfolio was an exercise in independent learning. His enthusiasm about the project surprised his classmates, who cheered and laughed as they watched him attempt to submit his portfolio before the project was completed.
Several students who reported they found the portfolio project exhausting took an opportunity at this point in the interview to ask the researcher questions about how to finish uncompleted portions of their portfolios. It is important to note that all 15 students who found the project exhausting were students who submitted their portfolios. On the other hand, several students who reported that portfolios were not exhausting (or who did not respond to this question) were among those who did not submit their portfolios.

**Question #5**

Did you feel that you were taking risks while working on the portfolio?

Six students (21%) answered that they felt they were taking some risks in completing their portfolios. Twenty-two students (76%) responded that they did not feel there was any risk in completing their portfolios. The students who felt that completing their portfolios involved risk stated that they thought their teacher required them to participate in the project. These students believed that if they did not submit their portfolios, they
could receive lower grades in EFL class. Below is a response typical of students who feared that their grades depended on their participation in the portfolio project:

**Alde:** *it may affect my grades and it is better to be safe because being careful is good.*

This student also indicated to the researcher that one of his academic performance strategies is to be sensitive to what his teacher wants, because whether or not he pleases his teacher will affect the teacher’s opinion about his scholastic achievement. Sensitivity to one’s teachers’ viewpoints is greatly valued in the Saudi Arabian culture. In Saudi Arabia, students tend to respect teachers and try to win their confidence, since this may influence the grades they assign in the future.

Another risk students associated with the portfolio project did not involve the issue of grades. Alde stated that he found the project risky because the portfolio would expose his weaknesses to other people:

**Alde:** *I feel embarrassed in front of the teacher if I reveal my limitations. I don’t like to show my weaknesses in front of the teacher and other students even if it would not affect my grades.*
The refusal to expose one’s weaknesses to others is typical among Bedouin tribes in Saudi Arabia. While current educational beliefs have it that students should reveal their limitations and ask teachers about material they do not understand, many Saudi students’ upbringing has taught them to be secretive. Alde. is an example of a student who is faced with the conflicting values of traditional culture and current educational theory. Finally, one student who experienced risk in completing his portfolio suggested that the researcher not disclose students’ portfolios to the EFL teachers:

**Alkh:** *I fear my teacher seeing my responses. The best way to avoid this fear is having our teacher not to see it.*

This student’s responses suggested to the researcher that he resisted demonstrating anything less than excellence in EFL class. When the researcher asked Alkh how he could help him to feel free to assess his EFL challenges using the weekly learning journals, the student responded that it would be better for teachers not to have access to students’ portfolios.
Question #6

If it was your choice, would you want your final grade to be based on a self-assessment portfolio or traditional tests?

A majority of the students (72%) answered that they would prefer to be graded on the basis of self-assessment portfolios. Four students (14%) responded that although they enjoyed learning using portfolios, they would prefer tests as the basis for their grades. Two of these four students created complete portfolios. One of these students, Ahmad, reasoned that grades should not be based only on self-assessment portfolios because student assessment is the teacher’s responsibility, not the student’s:

**Ahmad:** Writing or critiquing the class is not my job because it is the teacher’s job. They decided on what to study and there is a plan to study what we are studying and there is the supplemental grammar book which is great.

One interpretation of Ahmad’s response might be that he fears self-assessment could become a biased or self-serving process—can students really assess themselves fairly? On the other hand, Ahmad is an “A” student who is accustomed to receiving excellent grades, grades which are based on the
performance of memorization and recitation tasks. The self-assessment portfolio represents a different paradigm in which performance is defined as the process of identifying learning challenges, and Ahmad, while he enjoyed completing his portfolio, may have been uncomfortable with this alternative definition of achievement.

Another student preferred testing to the portfolio approach in part because testing is based on memorization, which in turn leads to the “engraving” of material on the student’s mind:

Hash: I prefer tests because what I write in the portfolio may not suit the teacher, but tests have nothing to worry since what I memorize becomes engraved in my brain and it is what the teacher wants me to write in the exam.

Hash, who did acknowledge that the weekly learning journals helped him to identify difficulties in EFL learning, preferred a straightforward approach having minimal influence on teachers. That is, when tests are based on memorization, answers are either right or wrong. In the portfolio process, students are asked to answer open-ended questions about their learning difficulties, the answers to which teachers may or may not appreciate. When
the researcher asked the student how he feels when he is graded poorly on tests covering material he has not memorized, the student responded that such result makes him want to study harder in the future.

Hash appears to assume that teachers would not value intellectual risk-taking as a positive aspect of learning, although risk-taking is considered a skill to be utilized in the learning of EFL. Instead, teachers would be on the lookout for “wrong” answers, for which students would be immediately punished with poor grades. Hash’s responses indicate that he is not a risk-taker with regards to his academic performance.

The student’s responses also point to the fact that rote memorization and recitation is given priority in Saudi Arabian schools, although officials now criticize this practice. For Hash, the recitation of memorized material is an educational habit he acquired over years of learning in Saudi schools.

Four students (14%) reported they were undecided about whether or not they would prefer their EFL grades to be based on self-assessment portfolios. All of these students had indicated during the interview that they did not plan to
submit their portfolios. A typical reason students provided for refusing to participate in the portfolio process was their inability to understand the portfolio’s requirements. However, it is also possible that these students simply did not want to work hard. For example, Alshe stated that he “could not understand the question” and that he didn’t believe completion of the portfolio would affect his EFL performance, yet he also stated that the portfolio had taught him to identify the difficulties he faced in EFL learning:

**Alshe:** *I learned how to review and how to assess ourselves by ourselves and take certain papers out and say why we liked it or not. I also learned the problems I face and try to analyze it so we reach recommendations.*

This excerpt shows that Alshe understood at least one objective of the portfolio process.

**Question #7**

*Have you ever used an assessment method similar to the self-assessment portfolio?*

All 29 students answered that they had never before used an assessment method similar to the self-assessment
portfolio. This result was not surprising. While the EFL curriculum allows teachers to assign homework, Saudi Arabian educators depend primarily on monthly tests and final exams to assess students’ performance. Moreover, as stated previously, such exams test student learning that has been based on memorization; the EFL teacher’s textbook encourages the teacher to have students learn by rote methods. Neither the teacher’s nor the students’ textbook support self-assessment or student reflection on the learning of past material.

**Question #8**

*Would you like to use self-assessment portfolios in your class next year?*

Twenty-three students (79%) responded that they would like to make use of the self-assessment portfolio the following school year. These students said that self-assessment portfolios made them think about how to learn English and that learning with the portfolio was enjoyable. Four students (14%) stated they prefer testing to the portfolio process and would not want to use portfolios next year. Two of these four students stated that self-assessment
portfolios are difficult. Two students (7%) were undecided about the future use of self-assessment portfolios but were unable to explain why.

All four students who preferred testing to the portfolio process explained that the reason they would not want to use portfolios in the future is that tests are less demanding. For example, one student, who told the researcher that he studies day and night during the two weeks prior to final exams, still preferred testing over portfolios because testing requires less study than do portfolios:

**Abde:** *I would choose tests because in tests we do not go back and review everything we did. However, portfolio we have to go back and it’s consuming.*

As this excerpt suggests, Abde does not like to study on a weekly basis. Instead, he prefers to study intensively just before final exams. This student has adapted to “cramming” for tests and does not want to change his learning style.

Like Abde, Alro is another student who prefers testing to the portfolio process because tests are less time-
consuming and do not have to be reviewed—once the test is completed, the task is over and done:

**Alro:** Tests are better for me because it is one shot and get done with. I get stuck sitting on the desk answering the questions and preparing it for the self-assessment portfolios, which is so much work.

Alro’s description of his preparation of the portfolio suggests that he appreciated the portfolio process— he did spend time on it. However, it appears that he prefers an easier process that does not require him to review lessons on a weekly basis. Like Abde, Alro appears to be adjusted to the pattern of memorizing and cramming before final exams. Assessing one’s learning on a regular basis, for Alro, serves to disrupt other daily activities.

The following excerpt summarizes the response of one student who stated that he would choose to use the self-assessment portfolio the following school year:

**Alde:** I will choose portfolios because it is more enjoyable, but tests put me in a bad mood and make me stressful. When you have to study a whole book in one day, wouldn’t you have your mood horrified and get headache. However, when you look for things with ease, isn’t it nicer! Moreover, tests suck and make me stressful. I also love the portfolios because I have to go back to books and find what I want whenever I want
to. When I search, I find new things and I feel relaxed as if I lost something and I found it.

As this excerpt shows, Alde provided a detailed explanation for why he preferred the portfolio process over testing, suggesting that the main reason he would choose to use the portfolio in the future would be to avoid test anxiety. This student refers to test anxiety three times in the excerpt above!

Alde’s responses clearly indicate that he enjoyed completing his portfolio. More specifically, this student appeared to appreciate that the portfolio allowed him to learn at his own pace. His comment that the portfolio causes him to regularly review material and thus learn new things points to the difficulty students face when their final grades are based on only two test scores. Such difficulty is faced by all Saudi students.

Two students (7%) were undecided about whether they would want to use self-assessment portfolios in the future but were unable to explain why. One of these students had indicated several misgivings about the portfolio in other portions of his interview. For example, he had stated that he felt uncomfortable revealing his learning difficulties to
his teacher and that he preferred the straightforward, right-or-wrong approach characteristic of exams.

**Question #9**

*Would you like to make any other comments?*

The students in this study, like Saudi students in general, are not accustomed to voicing their opinions publicly. Thus, only seven students (24%) made additional comments in response to Question #9. Some of the student data presented below was collected as the researcher returned to previous interview questions in order to clarify or confirm students’ answers.

One student stated that he wished to see challenging material added to the EFL textbook:

**Osam:** *The only thing I want to correct is the textbook so they [the Ministry] add more difficult items to what’s there.*

The curriculum used in the EFL classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School is applied to all students regardless of their performance—lesson plans are not adjusted to accommodate weaker or stronger learners. Osam, an academically excellent student, is regarded as an
excellent student by his EFL teachers; however, he found that the EFL textbook did not challenge him. Since he had to follow a curriculum designed for students who generally perform below his level, he was unable to learn as much as he wanted in the classroom. Osam indicated to the researcher that he hoped the self-assessment portfolio project might lead to changes in the EFL curriculum. Below is the response of another student who, like Osam, did not feel sufficiently challenged by the EFL textbook:

**Khalid:** It [the self assessment portfolio] is going to be newer thing to do and we will be motivated to learn something new. But, with this government textbook, everything is the same since last year (seventh grade) and there is nothing new to learn. It is exactly the same as ABC but now we add [details].

Khalid stated to the researcher that he hoped his school would implement the self-assessment portfolio in the future because the portfolio would provide students with opportunities for new learning. As this excerpt shows, Khalid feels that the curriculum used in his current grade repeats the same essential concepts that were provided the previous year and that any new material provided in this
year’s lessons is superficial, merely consisting of new exercises or new examples.

One student responded to Interview Question #9 with the suggestion that the Ministry of Education increase the hours devoted to teaching grammar. This student enjoyed the grammar textbook Communicative Grammar by Werner, Church, and Baker (1996) as a supplemental textbook to the main Ministry curriculum. His comments surprised the researcher, who knew that knowledge of grammar alone does not enable one to communicate fluently. When the researcher asked the student to explain his preference for the grammar textbook, the student responded that the book “adds a variety to the text” and helps him to use English in face-to-face communication:

Ahmad: Of course it [the grammar textbook] helped me by knowing how to use tenses in real life.

Ahmad’s comment that the grammar textbook “adds a variety” suggests that he finds the textbook to be pleasantly challenging. On the other hand, as stated in the above discussion of Interview Question 6, Ahmad is a student who is accustomed to receiving excellent grades based on the
performance of memorization and recitation tasks. Grammar studies involve questions that have exact answers; the grammar textbook includes exercises in the use of strict patterns and rules. Ahmad’s desire to spend more time on grammar studies may indicate a preference for rote learning and unambiguous information.

One student’s response to Interview Question #9 pointed to the issue of differences among learning styles:

Alsh1: *I wish to use portfolio instead of tests because when we study for some quizzes and monthly tests, not all students prepare for those tests except the A students and I am one of the students who don’t study.*

Alsh1’s response suggests that he is willing to engage in learning exercises—-he seems willing to use the self-assessment portfolio. On the other hand, not all students are motivated by quizzes and tests to study and thus learn. Alsh.1 is one of these students. For Alsh.1, the portfolio could serve as an alternative to traditional methods, methods to which he does not respond. Alsh1 also raised the issue of cheating on exams, informing the researcher that even he cheated in hopes of becoming an “A” student. This student suggested that the portfolio
process could eliminate cheating in class because each student’s “answer” to the portfolio’s main question, “What material was difficult for you?” is inherently unique and cannot be duplicated. While students could have copied each other’s portfolios without punishment, neither the researcher nor the rater observed such behavior.

The researcher later asked Alsh.1 his opinion as to what might make the portfolio process more appealing. The student’s response highlighted the importance of the teacher’s role in student performance:

Alsh1: It depends on the teacher because some teachers make class interesting, but others make it rigid such as giving us the portfolio and ask us to do it without any instruction. But if the teacher comes and say come on students, do it and I will give you prizes and gifts to encourage us, the student become convinced to do it depending on the difficulty of the item.

As this excerpt shows, Alsh.1 believes that the teacher is the main factor in whether or not the self-assessment portfolio is interesting to learners. His response suggests that he is aware of the teacher’s important role as students’ mentor and guide. Alsh.1’s comments also point to the need for teachers to explain the portfolio’s
requirements clearly and provide regular feedback (e.g., concerning students’ weekly learning journals).

The last series of excerpts presented in relation to Interview Question #9 concern a student’s focus on memorization and his apparent association of the portfolio process with traditional educational methods:

**Alsh2**: I wish to use portfolio instead of tests but they should give me the same time I have to study in the finals.

Alsh2’s response acknowledges that the completion of the portfolio takes time (and also points to the time demands posed by final exams. However, this student seemed not to realize that the portfolio process begins in the first week of the semester and continues throughout the course. Apparently, he failed to understand that the portfolio is not to be left for the “last minute”—the last two weeks of the semester.

Alsh.2’s concern with the time allotted for portfolio completion prompted the researcher to ask him about his learning style:

**Researcher**: How do you study?
Alsh2: I memorize and recite.

Researcher: Do you have to have assistance in tests to help you recite?
Alsh2: Yes, I need help when I memorize so they can see what I recited is correct or not.

Researcher: How did you learn to memorize?
Alsh2: I learned it when I was young when I used to memorize the piece of writing and recite it to my mom.

Researcher: Does school encourage you to recite?
Alsh2: Yes.

As these excerpts clearly show, Alshe2’s education is based on memorization and recitation. This student stated to the researcher that he liked to memorize and that such memorization was rewarded by the testing process—the tests to which he is accustomed require the recitation of memorized material. Alshe2’s responses also suggest that his teachers value learning by memorization, which takes time. The student seemed concerned that the self-assessment portfolio, if implemented, might not receive the same degree of school support given to the traditional testing process. To summarize, student interviews revealed that while none of the interviewees was acquainted with the self-assessment portfolio approach prior to this study, most interviewees understood at least one objective of the portfolio process.
Most interviewees enjoyed using the portfolio and most would choose to make use of it in the future. Most interviewees did not believe that completing the portfolio involved risk, and most would choose to base their grades on portfolios as opposed to traditional tests. The fact that most interviewees responded favorably to the portfolio project is notable given that most of these students also reported the project to be exhausting. The following section discusses findings obtained from interviews with Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School EFL teachers.

Instructor Interviews

Two EFL teachers were interviewed by the researcher. All three EFL classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School are taught by these two teachers, referred to in this study as Teacher A and Teacher B. Teacher A had been teaching English for eight years at the time his interview was conducted. Teacher B had been teaching English for 20 years. Both men are native Egyptians who came to Saudi Arabia to teach EFL.

Four topics were addressed during the teacher interviews: (1) whether teachers had knowledge of self-
assessment portfolios prior to the researcher's visit; (2) what teachers thought of the self-assessment portfolio and whether the portfolio would or would not work in their school; (3) how teachers would apply the self-assessment portfolio in their classes, i.e., what type of modifications teachers might make so the portfolio process might be implemented with their students; and (4) what suggestions teachers might make for improving student assessment at their school and in Saudi Arabia in general.

**Question #1**

Did you have knowledge of the self-assessment portfolio process prior to this present project?

Both EFL teachers reported that, prior to this researcher’s visit, they had little or no familiarity with self-assessment. Teacher A had been exposed to the self-assessment approach but had never used it in the classroom. Teacher B seemed not to have been exposed to the self-assessment approach prior to the researcher’s visit:

**Teacher A:** I heard about it when I was studying in 1986-87, but we never applied it.
Teacher B: We know of pupil assessment or teacher assessment, but not the self-assessment you [the researcher] introduced. In the past, the teacher was characterized as the dominant figure in education. Four years ago, I had never heard of student-centered education.

The EFL teachers’ unfamiliarity with self-assessment portfolios prior to this research was due in part to limitations in their own education. As Teacher A suggested, while teachers’ own schooling well have exposed them to the concept of student-centered education, apparently it did not provide them with methods to implement student-centered assessment. Moreover, as suggested by Teacher B, traditional teacher education would not have emphasized a student-centered approach. The training teachers traditionally received defined their role as the authority in the classroom.

Question #2
What is your opinion of the self-assessment portfolio? Could the portfolio be used at Manarat Al-Shargiah Intermediate School?

Both EFL teachers praised the self-assessment portfolio approach, noting that the portfolio develops students’
ability to critique their own performance and express their thoughts about whether and how they are learning. On the other hand, both teachers believed that some students might be unable to utilize the portfolio method:

Teacher A: Relatively, but I think it is difficult to apply. It may work with some students but may not work with others because we have seen it with the weak students right here in this school. But other students showed some improvement because I noticed some student portfolios getting better each week. And, it may not work with some students since those students do not have the ability to learn by themselves because they need to use processes that need matured abilities to be able to express.

Teacher A also noted:

Teacher A: [T]he students may not have the ability to learn by themselves because they need to use processes that require more mature abilities.

While Teacher A emphasized students’ immaturity as the reason they may be unable to benefit from the portfolio approach, Teacher B believed that any inability to utilize portfolios could be explained by inadequate student preparation:
Teacher B: We cannot wait until intermediate school to ask the student to start thinking with a new thinking process that he is not used to. It has to be an extension of previous student practices and of thinking processes at home...The students have not had practice before in expressing themselves freely. We can see here in recent weeks that the students interacted with the project with emotions when they did not know how to express themselves. Student abilities to give the reasons behind why they like or do not like something is not practiced; they are not used to doing that. (The kids were very cooperative, but their cooperation is not the main thing you were looking for...) However, some kids who are [excellent students] were able to express themselves because that is what they have practiced and learned outside of class--more than what they cover in the textbook.

As the above excerpts indicate, Teacher A attributed any student inability to participate in the portfolio process to students’ age or maturity level. This teacher considered the students in his classes to be too young (students were 14-16 years old) to engage in self-directed learning. Individuals in the 14-16-year-old age group are typically considered immature in Saudi Arabia and in the Arab world.

Teacher B, on the other hand, attributed student inability to utilize portfolios to a lack of prior training. In his view, students could not engage in the self-reflective thinking required by the portfolio simply because they are not used to doing so. This teacher suggested the
portfolio process be implemented at an earlier stage in students’ schooling so students could become accustomed to self-expression and critical thinking by the time they reach the intermediate school level. He reported that those students who were able to benefit from the portfolio had gained experience in expressing themselves outside of the classroom context.

**Question #3**

**What type of modifications would you make so that the portfolio process could be implemented with your students?**

Both EFL teachers believed the self-assessment portfolio could be modified in certain ways to better suit the students at Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School. Teacher B suggested that more questions be added to the weekly learning journals. Teacher A did not agree with this suggestion:

**Teacher A:** Well, I would not add more questions [to the weekly learning journals], but I would delete some. The students do not have the ability to be patient to answer such a number of questions. The students also do not have the strength to apply competencies that they lack. It may work better if we start at the beginning of the semester and try out the portfolios the first two or three weeks and then modify the
portfolios. I do think I can use portfolios as a measure of assessment.

Teacher A, in keeping with his opinion that students may be too immature to benefit from the portfolio process, reported that adding more questions to the weekly learning journals could become a burden to students—this teacher wanted to reduce the number of questions students needed to answer. Teacher A indicated that perhaps the best way to determine additional modifications to the portfolio approach would be to implement the portfolio at the beginning of a new semester and observe students’ reactions to it. Although this excerpt and the discussion above indicates Teacher A seemed to have mixed feelings about whether or not portfolios could be used with students at the intermediate level, this excerpt also reveals that the teacher does believe it is possible to use the portfolio as an assessment tool.

Teacher A also suggested that future implementation of the self-assessment portfolio showed include the assigning of grades to this activity. He referred to students’ speaking of English as an example what can happen when class requirements are not graded:
Teacher A: [If] we can increase the oral assessment from 1/5 of the grade to at least 20%...students will focus more and spend more effort to use English with the teacher and to be able to read and speak. The students now do not put much emphasis on speaking because they know they will not be graded for it.

This teacher noted that even the best students did not seem to take the portfolio as seriously as they took other class assignments, suggesting that the reason some students did not submit their portfolios was that the project did not affect students’ final grades. Teacher A believed that if students were to be motivated to utilize the self-assessment portfolio, their portfolios would have to be graded.

Teacher B’s discussion of modifications to the portfolio approach focused on more general issues faced by teachers:

Teacher B: It may work, and it may be better with the weak students since the student may know his points of weakness and strength. And it will help him more than having anybody else intervening in the matter. On the basis of the school, it may be looked upon as another heavy load since every teacher teaches 26 classes a week. When the student participates in the English Club activities, you feel that he is more active and productive than what you see in the class. I once brought them materials to do in a poster and the rest of the students brought everything from their homes. For example, one student brought something from the Internet, and another said I read this magazine weekly and I Xeroxed this page from it. The students’
performance was completely different than what we expected even though it is only one class a week. Also, certain activities cannot be done in the classroom because I am appraised annually on the neatness and quietness of the class in case the deputy or the principal enter the class. I have no space to make workgroups of fours or so. Think if one student wants to sit on the floor, it is his freedom. For example, last year I had as a class activity a visit to the library. I took the students to the library and I noticed that their productivity was more than what I expected.

Teacher B noted that the self-assessment portfolio might enhance his students’ achievement, perhaps to an even greater degree when students were weaker and had specific difficulties that can be identified. Yet this teacher also wondered whether other teachers would resist portfolio implementation because their workloads were already substantial—they were teaching 26 classes per week. One implication of this comment is that if the portfolio is implemented, teachers’ duties would need to be adjusted to accommodate it.

Teacher B seemed to associate the self-assessment portfolio with extra-curricular activities in which he had seen students participate in the past, observing that students were sometimes surprisingly enthusiastic about such activities. Yet the teacher cautioned that novel activities
or those that allow students to be creative may interfere with order and discipline in the classroom. It would seem that any implementation of alternative teaching tools should either conform to existing expectations concerning students’ behavior in the classroom or, alternatively, that current expectations about student order be adjusted to allow them to express enthusiasm for their activities. Such adjustments might also include instruction in speaking without interrupting.

**Question #4**

What suggestions do you have for improving student assessment at your school and in Saudi Arabia in general?

Teachers’ responses to this question dealt with the gap between the EFL curriculum developed by Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School and that mandated by the Ministry of Education; time constraints that limit teachers’ ability to include supplemental activities; and the expense associated with student textbooks and professional development.

The gap between Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School’s EFL curriculum and the curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education was an issue both teachers raised in
their discussion of the need to include curricular activities that challenge students:

**Teacher B:** In this school, we teach English from the first grade where the comprehension and reading level is pretty high by the time a student reaches sixth grade. The students then feel there is a huge gap between the current Ministry seventh grade EFL text and their English. Students in sixth grade can read four pages, and then they come to seventh grade and have to start the letters of the alphabet because of the Ministry textbook. [But] if the Ministry comes and sees that I am not covering all the required parts in the text, I may be reprimanded.

In addressing the difference between his seventh-grade students' command of English and the limited proficiency the Ministry assumes them to have, Teacher B acknowledged that there was little he could do to meet students' educational needs—if he did not teach according to the Ministry’s textbook, he himself could be disciplined.

Related to this, the Ministry-mandated EFL curriculum provides no extra time for supplemental activities. The curriculum was designed to include a lesson for each day of class—teachers are essentially unable to provide additional learning opportunities. One teacher illustrated the current constraints on his ability to include other activities using an example of the time he took his students on a field trip
to the library. The Ministry-appointed EFL supervisor, who supervises teachers’ administration of the EFL curriculum, spoke positively about the field trip but then asked the teacher if he had plans to make up the lesson that should have been taught that day. This teacher pointed out that any implementation of the self-assessment portfolio would have to include corresponding curriculum amendments by the Ministry--amendments that allowed teachers the time they needed to guide students in the portfolio process and respond to the educational needs they revealed therein.

On the other hand, Teacher B felt that the time constraints inherent in the current EFL curriculum would not necessarily need to be addressed before portfolio implementation. As described above, this teacher felt that the portfolio could be implemented if the number questions in the weekly learning journals were reduced.

Finally, one teacher noted that another deterrent to supplemental student activities or alternative teaching methods may be the price of textbooks in Saudi Arabia and the lack of alternative forums for professional development for teachers:
**Teacher B:** The books are so expensive that we do not want to require the students--or even ourselves, the teachers--to buy them. In Egypt, for example, I find the books priced in the range of $5, but here in Saudi it may reach $20. You cannot improve yourself without keeping in touch with the development of the field. Since the discontinuation of the TESOL [Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages] Forum years ago, we did not read anything about English-teaching methodology. I bring with me from Egypt journals so I can submit research papers if I am asked to.

This respondent stated that textbooks are so expensive in Saudi Arabian that teachers hesitate to buy them, although this may result in their being unable to keep abreast of developments in their field. This excerpt indicates that alternative resources for teachers (e.g., the TESOL Forum) are needed given the high cost of traditional resources for teachers.

To summarize, both teacher interviews revealed that while teachers were not well-acquainted with the self-assessment portfolio approach prior to this study, both teachers recognized the benefits of the portfolio approach and both were aware of some ways they might incorporate the portfolio into their own classes. Issues associated with portfolio implementation included student incentives (grades), teachers’ workload, curricular time constraints, the price of student textbooks, and the cost of materials.
Administrator Interviews

The three administrators interviewed for this study were a) the Manarat Al-Shargiah Intermediate School’s EFL supervisor (an Egyptian citizen), b) the school’s principal (a Saudi citizen), and c) a representative from the Eastern Province Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education (a Saudi citizen). All interview questions concerned the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classes. All administrators were asked the same questions. None of the administrators had been exposed to the self-assessment portfolio approach prior to this study:

**EFL Supervisor:** I have heard of a portfolio as a bag or business bag, but nothing else.

**School Principal:** I have heard of student assessment but not the specific one you [the researcher] brought to us.

**Eastern Province Directorate Representative:** No, I have not heard of this type of assessment that you have implemented in the Manarat school. We have never heard of your type of assessment. However, it would be
interesting to measure the students’ learning as an outcome of this type of self-assessment.

As these excerpts show, the EFL supervisor had not associated the term “portfolio” with student assessment before this study was initiated although the researcher was impressed by the EFL supervisor’s knowledge of the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) field. The school principal stated that he was familiar with the notion of student assessment, although he too was unaware of the portfolio approach. Finally, like the supervisor and principal, the directorate representative was also unaware of the self-assessment portfolio, although the Ministry has an entire division dedicated to issues of testing and assessment. This division regularly hosts experts from Westernized countries to present breakthroughs in assessment methodology. While the directorate representative indicated an interest in measuring the learning outcomes associated with the self-assessment portfolio, he reported that he would need to more thoroughly examine the portfolio’s objectives before he could comment further.

All three school administrators were aware of the Ministry’s plan to institute a continuous assessment
approach in intermediate schools in the near future. Thus, two of these respondents spent some time describing the continuous assessment process:

**EFL Supervisor:** Yes, I have heard before of continuous oral assessment and periodical assessment. The Ministry took out this type of assessment from the assessment regulation for schools. In a research, a doctor in ESL wrote similar to this notion. The doctor described this type of assessment to encourage teachers to provide students free time to express themselves orally about what they studied and the student is asked daily about what he studied.

The EFL supervisor associated the self-assessment portfolio with research presented by a holder of a doctorate in EFL who has taught in Saudi Arabia for the past twenty years. This research emphasizes the providing of opportunities to think quietly about ideas presented in class or written in homework assignments, discussing the importance of having students concentrate and brainstorm.

The school principal’s discussion of continuous assessment focused on its alternatives to current assessment methods:

**School Principal:** There is a new shift happening right now that is called continuous assessment. This type of assessment will be used at all grades, but the
elementary schools use it the most since it was implemented there a few years ago. Also, this type of assessment can be characterized to be a successful method. The teacher at the end of the first and second semesters sends an achievement report to the parent of the student to inform him of what is going on. Also, a panel of teachers is assembled to discuss if the student should move to the next level or repeat the year. The teacher is the person most responsible for the student since he has observed the student’s achievement since the beginning of the year. There are certain skills the teachers have to assess in the students, both major and minor skills. The student has to accomplish the major skills to move to the next level.

Continuous assessment has been used for the past eight years in Grades 1, 2, and 3 in Saudi Arabia. Both the directorate representative and the EFL supervisor reported that continuous assessment has proven to be successful. As stated above, the Ministry plans to implement assessment approach in Saudi’s intermediate schools in the future.

Continuous assessment requires the teacher to assess students monthly and eliminates the need for final exams. Students pass from one grade to the next based on their teachers’ year-long appraisal of their academic achievement—the teacher, not tests, determines whether the student is capable of performing at the next grade level. The skills and knowledge required to pass a grade are still determined by the Ministry.
At one point in his interview, the EFL supervisor gave the researcher a handout on continuous assessment. The researcher described the self-assessment portfolio process to the supervisor (Appendix J), emphasizing that such process may help students to identify their academic strengths and weaknesses and asking the supervisor whether he thought the continuous assessment process might be similar to the self-assessment portfolio. The supervisor responded that he did not believe the two types of assessment were similar.

Generally, school administrators seemed to agree that the self-assessment portfolio might benefit students to a greater degree than would the current testing process. For example, the school principal indicated that intensive final exams may cause serious stress-related difficulties for students, explaining that many students believe their already uncertain futures are unduly determined by standardized test scores.

Moreover, the principal noted, today students must face many distractions that threaten to keep them from studying for tests. He made the following comments as he contrasted his own school experience with that of today’s students:
School Principal: Well, my service is 29 years in this area of education. In the old days, when I was a student, my father never followed my progress in school and I used to spend more time and effort to succeed. There were no distractions such as Internet satellite dishes or cars. As a result, the student paid more attention to his school work. However, the student now is distracted by plenty of things. For example, if the parents tell their son to go do your homework, he may say give me a minute let me finish watching this movie or so. These are the difference between the past student and the current one. We can see these problems in the first elementary grades where the students deal with the PC or the Internet. Yet many community leaders and many teachers do not know how to work with computers, so, in some ways, this computer knowledge is a plus for the current student.

As the above excerpt shows, the school principal reported that in the past students focused more on schoolwork because they didn’t have alternative pursuits such as travel, movies, computers, or the Internet. According to the principal, the many alternatives available to today’s student may cause him to spend less time on his studies.

This administrator’s comments also suggest that students of today may be more generally lazy in addition to being distracted. The principal noted in the excerpt above that, unlike when he was a child, today’s students seem unable to progress in school without their parents’
supervision. He also provided a specific example of one student who would not study without his father’s help:

School Principal: One parent came to us saying that his son lay down on his back and the parent had to read to him so that the son understands his lesson books. It should be the student’s job to do his lessons--maybe with some guidance of the parent but not with the full involvement of the parents as we see now.

Finally, the principal also stated:

School Principal: Unfortunately, some students study only to get better grades and only to have a better GPA and not for the sake of knowledge.

While the school administrators seemed to agree that the self-assessment portfolio would benefit students to a greater degree than would the current testing process, administrators also had concerns as to whether students would be able to master the critical-thinking skills needed for self-assessment. Like Teacher B, the EFL supervisor noted that such skills are best learned when children are young:

EFL Supervisor: Practicing a good way of thinking is best begun as early in life as possible so the students learn good behaviors and good ways of thinking.
The administrators expressed doubts about the implementation of the self-assessment portfolio. They suggested that any attempt to introduce self-assessment might be met with resistance initially, as was the case with the continuous assessment approach. However, the administrators said, such resistance would probably disappear:

**School Principal:** Continuous assessment proved its success in our schools even though the process faced some disagreement due to the feelings of teachers of losing their control over the students. Those who disagreed were suspicious of how we can determine whether a student fails or succeeds. Now, the picture is clear and everyone has no doubt that this continuous assessment is a success.

Teachers initially disagreed with the continuous assessment approach because they questioned its effectiveness and because they thought such an approach would result in their losing control of their students. Once continuous assessment was shown to be beneficial, teachers accepted it. The school principal suggested that portfolio assessment implementation might undergo a similar process. Ultimately, the administrators stated, successful
introduction of the self-assessment portfolio depends on staff training and informing teachers, parents, and the general public about the portfolios approach:

**School Principal:** We would have to train all people involved in using the portfolio type of assessment—such as teachers. We may also introduce this type of assessment to the parents and may need to educate the public via newspapers about the positive aspects of this type of assessment. When the picture is clear to the parent, the teacher, the student, and the school administration, the implementation will succeed. However, if we apply this type of assessment without doing the aforementioned, we may face great hurdles in the future. Training all those involved is crucially important.

The school principal suggested that, in addition to teachers and parents, it may be necessary to inform Saudi society about the self-assessment portfolio approach, if such approach were to thrive in the long run. Without such a broad educational campaign, the principal reported, use of the portfolio could be significantly hindered in the future. As described earlier, while the Eastern Province Directorate representative indicated an interest in measuring the learning outcomes associated with the self-assessment portfolio, he reported that he would need to more thoroughly
examine the portfolio’s objectives before he could comment on portfolio implementation:

**Eastern Province Directorate Representative:** Well, I need an assessment plan such as a proposal to understand the objectives of the self-assessment portfolio process. From there, I can try to advise on the implementation. I think it would be interesting to measure student learning as an outcome of this type of assessment.

The directorate representative’s reluctance to discuss portfolio implementation with the researcher can be explained by his position of responsibility within the Ministry of Education. This administrator would shoulder the blame for any failed attempt to implement the self-assessment portfolio. Moreover, the directorate representative intends to be assured that the portfolio approach would not add to students’ existing difficulties with EFL.

To summarize, the administrators’ interviews revealed that while they were not well-acquainted with the self-assessment portfolio approach prior to this study, they recognized the benefits of self-assessment portfolio approach and seemed to believe that the self-assessment portfolio would benefit students to a greater degree than
would the current testing process. The administrators questioned whether students would be able to master the critical-thinking skills needed for self-assessment. They also suggested that any attempt to introduce the portfolio approach might be met with resistance initially, but that such resistance might eventually disappear. Ultimately, the administrators stated, successful introduction of the self-assessment portfolio depends on the training and informing of teachers, parents, and the general public. The following sections provide an example of the current EFL curriculum as contained in the students’ textbook and teachers’ guide.

Curriculum Overview

Saudi Arabia’s EFL textbooks are designed by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry provides one textbook to every student and one teacher’s guide to every teacher; both texts accommodate one year of schooling, or two semesters. Both the student textbook and the teacher’s guide are free of charge to students.
The Ministry textbook describes in detail each lesson to be provided in EFL classes. While teachers had more freedom in directing their classes in the past, at this time, every lesson is set forth in the textbook in hopes of maximizing teachers’ effectiveness. Since EFL classes are taught four days per week, 12 weeks per semester, the EFL textbook thus includes 12 units to be taught each semester; each unit contains four lessons. To provide a typical example of the textbook’s weekly units, Unit 19 is summarized below:

Unit 19 begins with a listening activity. The first lesson in this unit involves students in listening to an audiotaped recording of instructions on how to play football (soccer). This activity not only provides students with experience in hearing the sounds of the English language, it also encourages students to use the context of communication to further their understanding of that communication’s content.

The second lesson in Unit 19 intends to teach students how to form, use, and answer tag questions, for example, “Omar is going to watch the film, isn’t he?” Students are provided with four tag questions in this lesson. Learners
are to take turns asking and responding to these questions. Unit 19 also provides students with eight vocabulary words with which they are to form statements.

The unit’s third lesson engages students in the practice of writing a letter to a friend about their plans to visit their relatives. The textbook provides a sample letter whose format students are to follow. Students must also answer five questions about the contents of the sample, for example, “Where is Umar going to travel next week?” Students then write their own letters based on a series of pictures which provide suggestions for the letter’s content (e.g., the time of year the visit will take place or activities to occur during the visit).

Unit 19’s Lesson 4 reviews the previous three lessons, instructs students in the use of the future tense, and provides students with practice in listening to the sound of the letter R in eight words (right, Riyadh, Arabia, from, early, thirty, turn, and worse). The lesson’s material on the future tense is similar to one in Betty Azar’s classical grammar textbook, Understanding and using English grammar (1992) in which students follow a time line to determine the time referred to in speech. This lesson focuses on the
letter R because the R sound is used frequently by Saudi students, and like Spanish speakers, many Saudi students find the sound difficult to pronounce in the context of the English language.

**Teacher’s Guide**

The teacher’s guide that accompanies students’ EFL textbook begins with preliminary sections that introduce the guide and summarize each unit’s content. These sections provide an overview of the skills and grammatical structures students are intended to learn from each unit. A glossary is included which defines those words and expressions used in the guide with which teachers may be unfamiliar. The preliminary sections also list 15 general teaching guidelines as follows:

- a. Use your teacher’s book correctly.
- b. Active preparation is needed.
- c. Start as you mean to go on!
- d. Speak English.
- e. Talk less than your pupils.
- f. Do not waste time.
- g. Give every pupil a chance.
h. Focus pupils’ attention.
i. Give classroom instruction in English.
j. Encourage pupils who answer—even if they are wrong.
k. Drilling is not everything.
l. Make sure you finish the final activity.
m. Encourage pupils to use the revision pages.
n. Follow the handwriting model.
o. Tell your pupils about the importance of English.

Unit 19 (continued)

The skills described in the preliminary section that summarizes Unit 19 include spelling, reading, writing, and speaking sentences, questions, and short answers. The main grammatical point intended to be taught in Unit 19 is the future tense.

Lesson 1 of Unit 19 begins with the collecting of homework from the previous lesson (Lesson 4 of Unit 18). The teacher is then to teach the spelling of the number 19. The teacher’s main objective in Lesson 1 is to teach the use of the phrase going to in sentences that include planned activities, e.g., Ahmad is going to go to high school next year. The teacher is also asked to teach new vocabulary,
including the words going to, lose, nineteen, pass, score, and win. Finally, the teacher is asked in Lesson 1 to show flash cards showing the numbers 13-19, speaking the numbers aloud with students in groups and individually.

As is true of students’ textbook, the teacher’s guide is designed to set forth each EFL lesson in detail. Nothing is left to the teacher’s interpretation and teachers are allowed no room for creativity in their teaching. The teacher’s guide provides a full description of both course objectives and classroom activities. When the researcher asked the school’s EFL director the reason for such specific directions to the teacher, the director stated that some teachers might not be able to teach the lessons properly in the absence of such detail.

The researcher notes that the specificity of the teacher’s guide limits teachers ability to tailor instruction according to the needs of particular students. For example, the teacher cannot make lessons more challenging for advanced students who find the prescribed lessons too easy, neither can he make lessons simpler for students who are highly challenged by the learning of English. Instead, both the teacher and student must follow
each lesson as written, even though the absence of fit between the curriculum and students may result in frustration and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of students. The strict format of the EFL curriculum directly contradicts the notion of providing students with skills in autonomous learning, since the curriculum fails to take the needs of individual students into account.

Summary Discussion of the Data

The four sections below briefly describe the data obtained from the researcher’s observations and from students’, teachers’, and administrators’ interviews. The first three sections connect student and teacher interview data to three research questions.

**Topic A:**

The first research question asked about students’ perceptions of the self-assessment portfolio experience. Data related to this question may have been significantly affected by students’ age—again, students were all males who were from 14 to 16 years old. The researcher and others believe that individuals in this age group tend not to be
self-reflective and tend not to express themselves freely. In fact, the researcher was advised by several Saudi experts in the field of education not to conduct his research on intermediate students, but instead to study older students.

However, the researcher notes that expressing one’s opinion is not merely a function of age but is also a skill associated with critical thinking. Students in this study had not been trained to express themselves because their educational context does not encourage critical thinking or self-expression. On the other hand, perhaps if students had been older, they would have been more able to express their opinions regardless.

A second point this researcher would make about data related to the first research question is that such findings seem to be associated with students’ religious background. Students’ religious orientation may explain why the religious students in this study tended not to participate in EFL class and tended not to submit their portfolios. The researcher observed that it was the non-religious students who were accustomed to American or European practices and who felt positive about the English language. In fact, these students often needed to speak or listen to English as
they engaged in such practices, for example, as they sang a Western song or watched a Western movie. In contrast, religious students did not engage in Western practices because the Islamic religion prohibits such acts. The researcher believes that religious students were less motivated to learn EFL because English is associated with some behaviors of which their religion disapproves.

**Topic B:**

The second research question asked students whether or not the self-assessment portfolio helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses in the learning of EFL. Such identification of academic strengths and weaknesses is one of the portfolio’s main objectives; for example, Shohamy (1994) stated that using portfolios as a self-assessment tool assists EFL students in identifying their strengths and weaknesses regarding the skills students employ when learning English. Self-assessment portfolios help students to identify their metacognitive strategies while learning EFL and reflect about their process of learning, including their personal learning strategies. This tool helps students
to be aware of what they are studying and to develop opinions about how they are studying in English classes.

Given that the students in this study seemed to find it difficult to express themselves because of their age and their lack of prior experience, the researcher cannot be sure whether all students understood the portfolio’s purpose. On the other hand, since more than 69% of the portfolios submitted indicated that students understood at least one advantage of the portfolio process, the researcher can assume that, in general, students did use the portfolio as intended.

This study’s data did not address whether students learned enough about self-assessment to be able to apply such a process in the future. The length of the study was too short and data collection was too limited to allow for a determination of whether or not students had learned the skills associated with autonomous learning. In addition, some data suggested that students may actually need more time to become comfortable with exposing their weaknesses and finding solutions for them. Several students reported that the self-assessment portfolio could be of more benefit when it is applied at the beginning of the school year.
Comments of this nature suggested whether data on this topic need to be collected in future studies that students realized they were only beginning to develop autonomous learning skills.

**Topic C:**

The third research question asked EFL teachers about their perceptions of the use of the self-assessment portfolio in EFL learning. As stated above, both EFL teachers were Egyptian natives who came to Saudi Arabia to teach EFL. Based on his observations of both Saudi and expatriate teachers, the researcher believes that EFL teachers’ expatriate status impacted this study’s findings. For example, the researcher noted in his field notes that Saudi teachers who were not participants in this research did not show any interest in or curiosity about this study during the times when teachers would gather to talk (e.g., in the teachers’ lounge). However, expatriate teachers of subjects other than EFL showed interest in the study. It was the expatriate teachers who asked the researcher to describe the purpose of the study and explain why Manarat
Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School was chosen as the study’s site.

Perhaps the two EFL teachers, whose teaching contracts are renewed annually, showed interest in the study in an effort to portray a positive image to their supervisors. Perhaps they cooperated with the researcher because they felt that to do otherwise would lead to a discontinuation of their contracts the following year. Regardless of the reason for EFL teachers’ cooperation, the researcher acknowledges that their feedback was necessary for this study’s success.

**Topic D:**

This final section describes several issues associated with the implementation of Western approaches (e.g., the self-assessment portfolio) Saudi Arabia. Today, Saudi Arabia embraces Western technology and science but refuses to accept the Western lifestyle. For example, the researcher observed that Manarat Al-Sharqiah Intermediate School’s supervisor, whose educational background is religious, does not condone students’ imitation of Westernized behaviors. Such unwillingness to accept Western
behavior was illustrated when a student was caught wearing baggy pants to school one day. That student was called into the supervisor’s office and reprimanded.

While Saudi Arabia seems to appreciate the benefits of Western science, the growth in Western influence has created resistance against the English language on the part of some religious parents, teachers, and students. Some religious officials and parents view English as the language of western military machines whose killing of Muslims is broadcast on television; thus, they not only oppose the West; they also oppose the Western language (English). This attitude could be passed on to children (i.e., students). When students hear their parents blame the US for what is broadcast on television, some students become confused about whether they should study EFL; others develop a hatred for the subject. In turn, such feelings may prevent some students from being motivated to excel in EFL class.

However, Islam does not discourage the learning of foreign languages—in fact, the opposite is true. It is possible that, were it explained clearly to students that the learning of English is valuable while the adoption of the Western lifestyle is not, students may improve their
performance in EFL class. Politics should not influence the teaching and learning of foreign languages. However, in reality, it is understandable the language learning might be affected by social and political factors.

The researcher notes that the self-assessment portfolio could be viewed as a Western approach that is specifically designed to westernize students’, parents’, and officials’ thinking, especially given that the portfolio involves students in questioning and self-expression. In Saudi Arabia, it is the norm for young teenagers to listen and remain silent in gatherings the father arranges, even when that teenager has a question or point of view to express. Young adults are instructed to listen, not speak, to their elders in certain situations. Some members of Saudi society may assert that the self-assessment portfolio the development of poor social habits in students.

Chapter Summary

The central focus of this research was an examination of attitudes of EFL students and various educators in Saudi Arabia about the self-assessment portfolio, a Western alternative assessment approach. The self-assessment
portfolio process was new to both students and educators at the research site.

Of the 81 students who participated in this study, 43 (53%) submitted self-assessment portfolios. Of the 43 submitted portfolios, eight (18%) portfolios were categorized as “complete” (these portfolios were also “creative”), 25 (58%) were categorized as “partially complete,” and 10 (23%) were categorized as “incomplete.” Twenty-two (76%) of 29 students reported in interviews with the researcher that they enjoyed using the self-assessment portfolio. A number of students who did not submit portfolios indicated in interviews that they thought portfolios would be helpful in identifying strengths and weakness in their learning. The two EFL teachers and three school administrators interviewed described the self-assessment portfolio as a type of assessment worthy of future consideration because such an assessment method encourages students to adopt patterns of critical thinking and motivates students to learn.

The final chapter of this dissertation provides the study’s findings, offers recommendations for adopting self-assessment portfolios in the Saudi Arabian context, and
describes recommended for further research. The final chapter also describes inflictions and limitations of the research.
CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the perceptions of students and educators toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in the three EFL classes at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The researcher introduced the students to self-assessment by introducing a portfolio model. The study employed qualitative methods in collecting and analyzing the research data. This chapter presents: (1) a summary of the findings; (2) responses to the case study's research questions; (3) recommendations for further study; and (4) a framework for integrating portfolio self-assessment into the EFL programs of middle schools in Saudi Arabia.
Summary of the Findings

The data collected for this case study came from the following sources: student self-assessment portfolios; interviews with selected EFL students; interviews with the EFL teachers; interviews with selected Saudi school administrators; and the researcher’s field notes.

Student Self-Assessment Portfolios

The self-assessment portfolios were designed to enable students to become aware of both successful and unsuccessful strategies that they had applied in learning English as a foreign language. Students were encouraged to include any or all of the following items in their portfolios: a completed background questionnaire; a parental permission form to participate in the research project; weekly learning-progress journals; classroom handouts and assignments; a summary of the self-assessment experience; and any other item or items the student wanted to put in the portfolio. Forty-three of the 81 EFL students chose to submit self-assessment portfolios. Of these 43 portfolios, 33 were deemed complete--meaning that those portfolios included journal entries for five or more weeks. In addition,
portfolios were deemed creative if they contained material beyond homework assignments and competed questionnaires; eight of the student portfolios were considered creative. Several students were extremely creative in the physical aspects of the portfolio--adding elaborate color graphics or artwork to their portfolios. Four of the students were mentally creative in terms of submitting evidence indicating an intensive assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in the learning of English.

_Student Interviews_

Twenty-nine of the intermediate school's EFL students were randomly selected for one-on-one interviews with the researcher concerning the self-assessment portfolios. Data from the interviews indicated that none of the students had any familiarity with self-assessment portfolios prior to this researcher's project.

A majority of the interviewees (76%) reported that they enjoyed using self-assessment portfolios. Reasons given for enjoying the self-assessment portfolio process included: the portfolios are a less stressful method of assessment than tests, and the portfolio process allows for communication
with the teacher. Reasons for not enjoying the self-assessment portfolio process included: portfolios take too much time to complete and can be exhausting; some students also indicated that they did not enjoy the portfolio process because they have an aversion to the learning of English.

Seventy-two percent of the interviewees said that they would prefer their EFL grade was based on a self-assessment portfolio rather than on test scores. However, several interviewees indicated they would prefer grades based on tests because then they would not have study throughout the entire semester but could instead cram for the test for a week or two before the test was given. Seventy-nine percent of the interviewees said they would like self-assessment portfolios to be used in their EFL classes in the following school year.

Interview data also indicated that a majority of students (69%) believed they understood at least one objective of the portfolio process. Fifty-two percent of the interviewees said that the process had taught them how to recognize and describe a problem they encountered while studying English as a second language. Twenty-one percent of the interviewees said that the portfolio process involved
taking risks--primarily because self-assessment might expose the students' weaknesses to other people.

**Teacher Interviews**

The two EFL teachers at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school teach a total of three EFL classes; each class has about 27 students. Teacher A, who had eight years of teaching experience, teaches one class; Teacher B, who had 20 years of teaching experience, teaches the other two classes. Both of the teachers fully cooperated with this researcher in the conducting of his case study.

The teachers indicated that they had not had first-hand experience with self-assessment portfolios prior to this researcher's study. Both teachers praised the self-assessment portfolio process for helping students to develop abilities to critique their own work and for allowing students the opportunity to voice their opinions about their EFL classes. The teachers believed that to be effective, the portfolio should be graded.

The teachers did have some reservations as to whether or not the portfolio process would be of equal benefit to both strong and weak students. The teachers also questioned
whether or not intermediate students would possess the ability to think critically when that skill had not been emphasized in the students' earlier schooling.

Administrator Interviews

Three education administrators were interviewed for this case study—the intermediate school's principal, the EFL supervisor for the Manarat Al-Sharqiah school system, and a representative from the Eastern Province Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education. The administrators stated they had no previous knowledge of student self-assessment portfolios but instead thought of student assessment in terms of the Saudi continuous-assessment plan.

Generally speaking, the administrators had positive attitudes toward experimenting with self-assessment portfolios. They expressed concerns about the number of Saudi students who study only to receive good grades and not for the sake of knowledge. They were also concerned about the number of distractions in the modern world that pull students away from their homework.

Findings Based on the Research Questions
Six research questions guided this case study. Responses to the research questions have been formulated based on the findings. Those responses and related issues are discussed in this section.

**Research Question #1**

*What are the perceptions of EFL students at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school toward self-assessment portfolios?*

The majority of EFL students at the Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school had positive perceptions toward self-assessment portfolios. The main reasons students gave for these positive perceptions were that self-assessment portfolios were less stressful than tests, self-assessment portfolios provided a means of communication with the teacher, and self-assessment portfolios helped students to learn about their learning process.

Despite their positive perceptions of portfolios, many students found self-assessment portfolios difficult and/or time-consuming to create. On the days that this researcher visited the school, he was constantly stopped by students who would ask if they were doing their portfolios correctly.
These findings are similar to those presented in a 1996 article by teachers Robins, Ketter, Burns, Cox-Hughes & Roberts. The teachers had introduced self-assessment portfolios to American students taking college courses in education. The main complaints of Robbins et al. students were that portfolios took a lot of time to complete and students had only a vague idea of what a portfolio should include. Robbins et al. noted that these concerns—particularly the concern over exactly what a portfolio is—caused a number of their college students to resist the portfolio experience. This researcher did not find such concerns to cause a high level of initial resistance in the intermediate school students participating in his case study.

Several reasons may explain why the intermediate-level students (eighth-graders) in this study showed less resistance to the introduction of a new form of assessment than did the college students in Robbins et al. (1996) study. The first reason is age; the students in the present study were about eight years younger than the students in the Robbins et al. study. Children often show less resistance to new ways of doing things than do adults.
Moreover, culturally speaking, the Saudi students may have been more accustomed to cooperating with the wishes of adults than American students. Also, because this researcher handed out a list of questions that students might choose to answer in the portfolio journal entries, the Saudi students may have had more concrete notions about what to include in a portfolio. Further research of this nature needs to be conducted in different parts of the country since attitudes may differ from one region to another.

Both the Saudi and American students were obsessed with the relationship of self-assessment portfolios and grading. It seems that students from both countries may be more concerned with competing for good grades than with learning. Saudi students asked this researcher if the portfolio would affect their grade; when told “no,” some of the students responded that in that case, there was no reason to do the portfolio. Many of the Saudi students who did not turn in self-assessment portfolios said that portfolios are a good idea—they were just not worth the effort since they were not being graded. A number of Saudi students also commented that they believed self-assessment portfolios should, in the
future, be used as one component to determine student grades.

A reason given by several Saudi students for their negative perceptions of the self-assessment portfolio in EFL classes was a dislike for learning the English language. In these cases, the dislike for learning English was not due to the fact that the language was difficult for them to learn; instead, students found the English language distasteful for political reasons. These students preferred not to participate in a process having origins in the West. However, those students also hated the current testing system which is reflected in numerous newspaper articles during the two weeks of the final examination.

Several Arabic newspaper articles; for example, Alwatan, 605, May 27, 2002; Alyuum Newspaper, 10218, June 6, 2001; and Alwatan, 608, May 30, 2002 provided support that current Ministry designed tests cause students and parents nervous tension about final examinations. The researcher selected three newspaper articles and translated them into English. One of the articles suggested that the Ministry should design a better method of assessment than the currently used one because there is a mismatch between what
the students are being tested on and what universities require them to know. Such an analogy by the journalist implies that the current teaching and assessment models used in schools depend primarily on memorization and recitations, which is less emphasized in universities since they use more of a self-guided learning process.

**Research Question #2**

Do the students perceive the self-assessment portfolios as helping the students to identify their strengths and/or their weaknesses in EFL learning?

About half of the students who submitted portfolios reported that they perceived the portfolios to be helpful in identifying their strengths and/or weaknesses in EFL learning. Some of the strengths and weaknesses identified by the students included the use of verb tenses, vocabulary acquisition, oral conversation, and grammar. Many students were more interested in using the portfolio to discuss their strengths rather than their weaknesses. In fact, a number of students were concerned about portfolios exposing their weaknesses to others. At the same time, many of these same students said that they liked portfolios because portfolios
allowed them to tell the teacher where they were having difficulties.

This situation probably is not as contradictory as it sounds. Culturally speaking, Saudis typically do not like to discuss their weaknesses; it is better to appear strong in the eyes of others in order to have that person's respect. Such a cultural edict could have caused students’ reluctance to discuss their weaknesses.

Chapter 4 included a detailed look at the portfolios turned in with selected examination of Sami and Khalid, two EFL students. A student with an "A" grade average, Sami turned in a complete portfolio with 12 learning journal entries--the maximum number of entries asked for by this researcher. His portfolio was decked out with colorized computer graphics. In the portfolio, Sami briefly mentioned that his strengths include grammar and vocabulary acquisition, and Sami also wrote a lot about how weaker students slowed the class down and how EFL classes should be divided into sections with the strong students in a class by themselves and the weak students in a class by themselves. Sami did not discuss any personal weaknesses he had in EFL learning.
Khalid appeared to be a rebellious and hostile student at times. His incomplete portfolio included two learning journal entries and some ragged, ripped-out pages from his EFL workbook. Khalid did not fasten the pages of his portfolio into a binder.

On the surface, it appeared that Sami had turned in a far superior portfolio. But a closer perusal changed this researcher's mind. Although Sami put together a very pretty-looking portfolio, his journal entries did not actually analyze his strengths and weaknesses in EFL learning. One might say that Sami did not take any intellectual risks in putting together his portfolio. This researcher had to wonder whether Sami's portfolio was used as a learning aid or whether it was completed just to please the teacher and the researcher.

On the other hand, Khalid, while not one who frequently sets out to please the instructor, did use the portfolio for self-assessment. Khalid told this researcher that he likes to sit in the back of the class where he talks, passes notes, eats food he has snuck into the classroom, and cheats on tests. In his portfolio's two journal entries, Khalid discussed his problems with verb tenses and new vocabulary
words. The student also discussed the ways he found to ease the problems--persistence and asking the teacher questions. It appears that through his self-assessment experience, Khalid has developed the authentic strategies that Ferris and Tagg (1996) have written about--strategies that can be applied in future classes, and more importantly, in life itself.

Khalid appeared to be one of the few students who seemed to truly understand the concept of a self-assessment portfolio as a way to assess one’s own strengths and weaknesses and to identify helpful learning strategies. Understanding this concept appears to have been quite difficult for many of the students. One reason for this problem could be that education in Saudi Arabia has traditionally been based on memorization and recitation rather than critical thinking. Most likely, the EFL students at the intermediate school had not previously been asked to do this type of self-analysis.
Research Question #3

What are the perceptions of EFL teachers at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL learning?

The two EFL teachers at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school perceived the self-assessment portfolio process as a good way to help students develop abilities to critique their own work and allow them the opportunity to voice their opinions about their EFL classes. The teachers believed that to be effective, the portfolio should be graded.

The teachers had some reservations as to whether or not the portfolio process would be of equal benefit to both strong and weak students. In particular, the teachers were concerned that self-assessment portfolios might not be effective with the weaker EFL students. This was a legitimate concern for teachers who had only basic knowledge of self-assessment. However, one purpose of the self-assessment portfolio was to allow students to proceed at the pace that best suits their learning.

Moreover, as noted in the above discussion of Research Question #2, this researcher found that some students who
were assumed to be weaker (e.g. Khalid) used their portfolios to develop learning strategies, while stronger students often concentrated more on portfolios as aesthetic objects perhaps because they did not want to take risks that could threaten their position as strong students.

The teachers also had reservations as to whether or not intermediate students would possess the ability to think critically when that skill had not been emphasized in the students' earlier schooling and probably had not been emphasized in the home by the students' families. The teachers indicated that the provision of explanations for why one likes or does not like something is not practiced; the students are not used to this process.

Teacher B was concerned that the self-assessment portfolio process might frustrate or stress students unaccustomed to freely expressing their opinions. The teacher made the following comment during the study:

Teacher B: The students have not had practice before in expressing themselves freely. We can see here in recent weeks that the students interacted with the project with emotions when they did not know how to express themselves. Student abilities to give the reasons behind why they like
or do not like something is not practiced; they are not used to doing that.

As indicated by Teacher B’s comment, students had not attempted to express their views of educational practices prior to this research. Students had not been given the opportunity to express such views in the past.

Teacher B went on to suggest that the students who practiced critical thinking outside of class were the ones who were able to do so in class for this project:

Teacher B: Some kids who are excellent [students] were able to express themselves because that is what they have practiced and learned outside of class--more than what they covered in the textbook.

Teacher B believes the home environment is what explains some students’ ability to think critically, as school does not provide that opportunity. According to Teacher B, those students who used the self-assessment portfolio to express themselves at school did so because they had learned how to express themselves at home. Such finding is also supported by Fusco (1993) who provides a practical guide for implementing and organizing portfolio for evaluation in 133 pages.
Yet Teacher B also suggested that other students began to acquire critical thinking skills by the end of the semester. He noticed that students who had not expressed themselves at the beginning of the project did eventually start to communicate their preference or dislike for particular EFL subjects.

Both teachers cooperated fully with this researcher throughout the study. Teacher B, who helped this researcher set up the study, approached the project with great enthusiasm. Reasons for Teacher B's enthusiasm for the project could be that he had more than twice the teaching experience of Teacher A. In addition, Teacher B previously had taught in his home country at a school that was a joint American/Egyptian venture, so he had more familiarity with American teaching philosophies. As educator Polakowski noted in Student portfolios (1993, National Education Association): "Enthusiasm about student portfolios is contagious, so spread it."

It is interesting to note that a greater percentage of Teacher B's students turned in portfolios (56% versus 46%)--and that a greater percentage of the portfolios turned in by Teacher B's students were complete portfolios (47% versus
27%). All of the creative portfolios came from Teacher B's classes.

**Research Question #4**

*What are the perceptions of selected education administrators in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL learning?*

Polakowski (1993, National Education Association) noted that administrative support is a must for successful implementation of a self-assessment portfolio program. Overall, the three education administrators interviewed for this case study—the intermediate school's principal, the EFL supervisor for the Manarat Al-Sharqiah school system, and the representative from the Eastern Province Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education—had positive perceptions toward the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classes.

The administrators expressed concerns about the number of Saudi students who study only to receive good grades and not for the sake of knowledge. Because self-assessment portfolios focus on the process of learning rather than the
product of learning, the administrators perceived that portfolios could be an effective strategy for shifting the goals of students from grades to learning.

One reason the administrators may have been so open to this researcher’s self-assessment study is that education administrators throughout Saudi Arabia are aware of shortcomings in the traditional assessment program used in the country’s intermediate and high schools. This traditional program assesses students almost exclusively though standard tests given at the middle and end of the semester. These two tests count for 70% of a student’s grade, with the remaining 30% based on attendance and participation.

Saudi education administrators have realized that this traditional assessment has brought about two major problems. First, many students become extremely stressed—even to the point of despondency—when exam time rolls around. Second, many students do not study throughout the semester but instead cram for the exams during the two weeks before the tests are given. The two-week test cramming period is notorious in Saudi Arabia as a time when families do not turn on the television or socialize because the children are
locked in their rooms trying to learn an entire semester’s lessons in fourteen days.

In an effort to encourage continuous learning throughout the semester, Saudi education administrators have adopted a continuous-assessment program that will begin during the 2002-03 school year. Under the new plan, the standardized midterms and finals will still be given but will be worth only 30% of a student’s grade. Fifty percent of the grade will come from new monthly tests; the remaining 20% will be based on attendance and participation. One fundamental aspect that remains constant in both the old assessment program and the newer continuous-assessment program is that student assessment remains tied to memorization and recitation. It will be necessary to examine the results of the new regulations to determine their effectiveness at the end of the year.

**Research Question #5**

*What possible adjustments or changes might be required in order to further implement the use of self-assessment portfolios at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school and other schools in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia?*
Student participants both in this present study and in Robbins and Ketter’s (1996) study embarked upon the task requested of them with great nervousness. Both groups of students complained about the time it takes to build a self-assessment portfolio; both groups had some doubts as to what exactly a self-assessment portfolio is; and some members of both groups were so obsessed with their grades that they could not concentrate on their portfolios. It can be assumed that the rowdier Saudi students who sat in the back of their classrooms telling jokes, passing notes, eating candy, and paying little attention to their teachers have counterparts in American intermediate classrooms.

In other aspects, the Saudi and American students differed markedly. Because of cultural differences, the Saudi EFL students were considerably less likely to express themselves freely, think critically, and discuss their weaknesses. This study found that Saudi EFL students were not able to express their opinions on issues related to education. The findings suggest that students were encouraged by their parents and teachers simply to memorize and recite the information presented in EFL classes. Critical thinking was not considered part of the education
these classes would provide. Such an educational approach may have contributed to students’ inability to express their opinions freely. This topic should be researched in the future.

However, the findings of this study do not suggest that students are unable to learn the process of critical thinking. Examination of students’ portfolios indicated that students possess the potential to learn the self-assessment portfolio approach. Based on these findings, the researcher does not conclude that future implementation of self-assessment portfolios must necessarily result in failure.

While a number of students in this study did not complete self-assessment portfolios (47%), the majority of students, all EFL teachers, and all administrators believed in the benefits of such an alternative assessment methodology. For example, one student indicated that he recognized the advantages of the self-assessment procedure, but that he felt sluggish in completing the task. (This student felt the same way about EFL class duties that included homework.)

It is suggested that the reason many students did not complete self-assessment portfolios relates more to habits
students have acquired in the course of previous education than to the self-assessment portfolios themselves. The educational system in Saudi Arabia forces students to follow directions literally and does not encourage creative thinking. Given that most students did not object to applying this new method of assessment and in fact recognized the benefits of such assessment, future implementation of self-assessment portfolios seems promising, provided students are assisted in overcoming current weaknesses in expressing themselves and thinking critically.

This researcher has suggested that longer implementation of the self-assessment portfolio process could help students overcome such weaknesses. Future implementation may necessitate that the process begin at the start of the semester and continue for at least two consecutive years. A two-year implementation period should teach students to think critically and independently, and thus engage in learning in an autonomous manner. Specific suggestions on the implementation of self-assessment portfolios at Manarat Al-Sharqiah are provided in the
Framework suggested for the Ministry of Education (Appendix V1) and discussed in the next section.

**Research Question #6**

*What preliminary conclusions can be drawn about the introduction of a non-indigenous (Western) instructional strategy (self-assessment portfolios) into a Saudi intermediate school?*

The concept of the self-assessment portfolio grew out of educational developments and philosophies of Western culture—philosophies that are sometimes a world apart from those of Saudi Arabia. This researcher compared the findings of his case study on the introduction of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classes in a Saudi intermediate school with the findings of case study by Robbins and Ketter (1996) on their introduction of self-assessment portfolios in education classes in an American university. This researcher was surprised to find that, despite the differences in age and in national origin between the two groups of students, the two groups of students had some similar reactions.
On the other hand, through this case study, this researcher has identified three major cultural differences that affect the use of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classes in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Saudi EFL students are considerably less likely to express themselves freely than are American students; Saudi EFL students are less likely to have experience in critical thinking; and Saudi students are less likely to discuss their learning weaknesses with others.

For a long time in Saudi Arabia, the teaching of EFL was opposed by religious officials in Makkah due to their belief that such teaching might in turn teach foreign customs to Saudi children. The situation did not change considerably over the years, although parents did acknowledge the importance of the English language for the job market. All jobs now demand proficiency in English and in computer software handling.

While some Saudi students have oriented slightly toward non-indigenous cultures, for example, showing an appreciation for American movies or British comedies, one of this study’s findings was that students who adopted few Westernized habits were considered good students in the EFL
classroom. Showing any such habit in Saudi schools is heavily punished by school officials. For example, students are not allowed to wear pants since this is considered an imitation of Westernized cultures. The Ministry of Education’s dress codes, including the prohibition of wearing pants, is intimately connected with the broader cultural-religious customs of Saudi Arabia.

Yet the Saudi population has had to confront the invasion of Westernized habits into its daily lifestyle. This has been the case especially since the 1990 crisis in Kuwait, in which Westernized customs invaded the indigenous cultures of all Persian Gulf countries. This influx of foreign customs led the Saudi people to wonder whether and how certain Westernized approaches might work without violating their indigenous customs.

With regard to this study, while some student participants and their parents believed that the EFL classes violated their cultural-religious beliefs, findings did not indicate that the self-assessment portfolio itself posed any such violation. Religion plays a fundamental role in Saudi Arabia’s values and traditions; however, Islam by no means opposes the learning of another foreign language. On the
contrary, the prophet Muhammad, Peace be Upon Him, encouraged all Muslims to learn other languages in order to facilitate the spread of Islam. Other support for the learning of foreign languages is provided by the translation of Indian, Persian, and Roman scientific texts in the eighth century, which led Muslim scholars to contribute to the several fields including algebra, chemistry, physics, and philosophy. These contributions would not have been possible without learning the language in which the original texts had been written. The notion of the conflict of Islamic beliefs with the learning of a foreign language can be considered false (Aldossary, 1992).

To summarize, the implementation of self-assessment portfolios within a Saudi intermediate school can be accomplished without violating cultural-religious customs as long as such portfolios do not rely on specific materials that conflict with Islamic beliefs. This study’s findings indicate that implementation of self-assessment portfolios is possible, in part because the researcher was careful to adapt the Westernized assessment methodology to fit the Saudi culture.
This case study showed that students are able to do creative thinking using self-assessment portfolios. However, as discussed previously, students were hesitant to express themselves freely because their teachers have not traditionally accepted their opinions as part of a broader approach to education. Moreover, the EFL curriculum does not provide for discussion of how and why students learn in a particular context. Maximizing the benefits of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classrooms would require constructive changes in the broader EFL curriculum. Finally, since education in Saudi Arabia is centralized, any educational innovation needs to be supported by the country’s Ministry of Education.

The implementation of self-assessment portfolios in EFL classes might face rejection by some teachers and demonstrators across the country initially. As was indicated in this study’s interview of the intermediate school’s principal, teachers may argue that self-assessment portfolios cannot work because they would prevent teachers from having have full control over students. But while objections may take place at the beginning, if the self-assessment portfolio approach is implemented in accordance
with Saudi cultures and values, it may result in generations of students who know how to think about the information they acquire in their classroom and in their societies.

The researcher also suggests that any implementation of strategies from Westernized societies should not be expected to work immediately in the Saudi Arabian EFL context. Researchers should remember that they are dealing with human beings who differ depending on their culture and, in addition, Saudi culture is a complex phenomenon.

Finally, it must be said that international politics can play a role in the introduction of non-indigenous instructional strategies in Saudi schools. In Saudi Arabia, there is no division of church and state. Thus, Saudi schools are Muslim schools. As long as there are serious tensions between Muslim countries in the Middle East and the predominantly Judeo/Christian Western world, the implementation of strategies from the West into Saudi schools will alienate a certain number of students and possibly some of the parents and teachers.

In the next section, the researcher suggests a framework for integrating self-assessment portfolios into EFL middle schools in Saudi Arabia. In addition to providing
a general framework for implementing the self-assessment portfolio process into Saudi EFL classes, the model makes specific recommendations for addressing cultural differences.

Recommended Framework for Integrating Self-Assessment Portfolios into EFL Middle Schools in Saudi Arabia

The majority of Saudi experts in both general assessment and EFL assessment in particular know the shortcomings of the current curriculum used by the Ministry (Aldossary, 1992; Zaid, 1993; Al-Arfaj, 1996 & Alfalaj, 1998). Aldossary (1992) suggested that Saudi students like to learn EFL; however, both religious students and religious officials have reservations about the subject that are related to cultural-religious values. Zaid (1993) inquired into the reasons why EFL achievement is so low in Saudi public schools and recommended improvements to EFL preparation programs, EFL policy, the EFL textbook, and teachers’ teaching and assessment methods. Al-Arfaj reported that a high percentage of EFL students encounter difficulties when reading EFL texts. Finally, Alfalaj recommended the use of various teaching and assessment methods, including that of portfolios. In light of this research, as well as this case
study’s findings, the implementation of self-assessment portfolios may be a solution for improved teaching and learning of EFL in Saudi Arabia. More research is needed to document the improvements, however.

The first step in introducing self-assessment portfolios to Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Education should be to familiarize staff with a basic definition of self-assessment portfolios and provide it with the results of this case study. Although it will also be necessary to describe how the self-assessment portfolio works in every educational stage, this discussion focuses on portfolio implementation in middle schools.

The integration of self-assessment portfolios into Saudi middle schools should follow five steps adapted from Barnhardt, Kevorkina, and Delett (1998), which include (1) setting the self-assessment portfolio’s purpose; (2) identifying instructional objectives that include the matching of tasks to current objectives and setting criteria for evaluation; (3) determining organization; (4) screening progress; and (5) evaluating the self-assessment portfolio process (Appendix V). These steps are necessary to ensure the portfolio’s reliability and validity. Implementation of
the self-assessment portfolio into the curriculum should also employ elements from Shores and Grace’s (1998) model.

**Possible Implementation Scenario Upon Ministry Approval of the Framework**

Carless (2001) stated that it is preferable to integrate innovative teaching methods into the existing curriculum. One such innovative method may include the use of self-assessment portfolios. Introducing the self-assessment portfolio process within the current Saudi curriculum is more feasible than reconstructing the existing curriculum (Carless, 2001).

If self-assessment portfolios are used to evaluate foreign language learners, the process must also enable students to evaluate their own learning progress (Schrier & Hammadou, 1996). For example, self-assessment portfolios might include a weekly learning journal as adapted from the Self-Assessment of Foreign Language Skills developed by the European Council for Cultural Cooperation (1984) (An adopted translated version can be found in Appendix VV). The weekly learning journal encourages students to document their feedback on the process of learning. Other portfolio
components might include a section students can use to learn how to critique content in addition to their learning process.

Assuming that the Ministry approves of the integration of self-assessment portfolios within Saudi’s EFL classrooms, the researcher proposes the meeting of a panel of experts to develop a detailed, week-by-week implementation plan. It is suggested that initially self-assessment portfolios be implemented only in select elementary and intermediate schools to facilitate the assessment of such effort. The panel of experts may consider pilot schools from the main provinces (Eastern, Central, Western, Northern, and Southern).

The self-assessment portfolio implementation plan should include regular panel meetings with the principals of the pilot schools. The plan should also include a three- to four-week seminar for EFL teachers. This seminar would focus on the details of authentic assessment and self-assessment; self-assessment portfolios; and the design of particular self-assessment portfolios to fit with particular schools.
The Ministry’s implementation of self-assessment portfolios within Saudi schools will require changes to the curriculum, grading procedures, and teacher training. These areas will be discussed in the following sections:

**Curriculum**

The current syllabus is mandated by the Ministry and set forth in a Ministry textbook which details the specifics of each lesson (Appendix S, T and U). One standard curriculum is applied to all schools in Saudi Arabia to facilitate countrywide weekly assessment. This standard curriculum does not leave any space for the interception of poor students, nor does it promote creative thinking on the part of students. Moreover, the current curriculum does not address students who respond poorly to the grading system and thus resist making extra effort. Sajavaara (1987) suggests the complexity of foreign language learning causes most students simply to credit their failure to their own incompetence, even in instances where the true fault lies with the instructor or the syllabus.

Despite the weaknesses in Saudi’s existing curriculum, since this study’s findings suggest the ability of self-assessment...
portfolios to complement the current curriculum due to their flexibility (Shohamy, 1994), no substantial changes in the curriculum will be proposed during the first two to four years of portfolio implementation. The model used in this case study can apply to the current curriculum provided the portfolios are graded and class time is allotted for students to discuss their portfolios with their teachers. The implementation of the self-assessment portfolio will require a specified amount of time could be assigned weekly for student-teacher discussion groups. A panel of experts should determine whether additional time is needed for teachers to revise the self-assessment portfolio process.

**Grading**

Even though the grading process may cause some stress for students, especially if they are unclear about what the self-assessment portfolio requires, the grading of portfolios is necessary to motivate students to complete the assignment and take it seriously. This researcher noted that several students complained about having to complete their portfolios “for nothing.”
Portfolio grading should take place in accordance with the current grading system mandated by the Ministry and described in Chapter 3. Teachers should be allowed to assign at least 20% (20 points) of the year’s grade (10 points per semester) to the portfolios.

A list of standards should appear on the cover of each portfolio so that students understand the requirements for a given grade (A, B, C, or Unacceptable). Such standards can be decided by a Ministry-appointed panel of experts. However, standards should address both short- and long-term objectives. The primary goal of the portfolio process is to develop that quality of self-assessment that leads to autonomous learning. Finally, portfolio grading should serve the well-being of every student and should address the ability to engage in creative thinking.

**Teacher Training**

According to Puckett and Black (2000), three-goals of the self-assessment portfolio process are as follows: (1) to promote students’ self esteem, self respect, and satisfaction with the curriculum; (2) to guide students towards autonomous and diverse learning; and (3) to guide
students towards challenging, meaningful, and progressive learning experiences. Teachers play a major role in developing students’ ability to engage in creative thinking. Since creative thinking is not emphasized in Saudi schools, Saudi teachers will need training and practice in allowing students to voice their opinions on the study and learning of EFL. Teachers will need to learn to perform the role of guide or moderator, one who helps students choose their own methods of learning or solving problems. A sort of collaboration of EFL teachers with students is the key to the success of the self-assessment portfolio (Puckett & Black). The self-assessment portfolio will address the different needs different students have regarding the learning of EFL.

Training in the use of portfolios can be enhanced with an electronic discussion board pilot teachers can use to post questions, findings, and opinions related to the portfolio process. This discussion board would be accessible via the Internet and would be accessed by both teachers and administrators.

Teacher training can also be enhanced as teachers present portfolio samples and a summary of their findings.
and experiences at a teachers’ seminar to be scheduled for the end of the second year of portfolio implementation. A panel of experts may provide teachers’ reports along with recommendations and suggested project revisions to the Ministry’s Research and Development division. Further research of this factor is needed.

**Personal Analysis**

As a native Saudi, this researcher feels that the introduction of unmodified westernized (non-indigenous) educational approaches within a culture such as Saudi Arabia would be a disappointing experience. Saudi culture, which is influenced by Islamic practices, would reject any westernized approach that might cause the people’s lifestyle to become something other than that mandated by the religion.

Resistance from religious groups would be especially likely to occur in response to educational approaches related to the English language. The close relationship between culture and language suggests that the teaching of a foreign language would necessarily entail the teaching of foreign cultural behaviors and thus conflict with the Saudi
religion. For example, a Western English textbook may include a picture of a woman wearing a short skirt. Such material would in turn cause difficulty for the English teacher and his students.

Therefore, in order to introduce any westernized educational approach within Saudi Arabia, such westernized approach must be tailored to fit the Saudi culture. For example, the researcher has always had to modify EFL textbooks that are written and published by non-Muslim authors. As another example, if a researcher comes to Saudi and tries to justify freedom of speech using examples related to the United States, freedom of speech would be rejected without hesitation since the American lifestyle is viewed as opposing Saudi religious values. However, if freedom of speech is introduced in such a way that Islamic guidelines are not violated, the concept could be accepted. If non-indigenous approaches go beyond compliance with Islam and instead serve to facilitate the religion, such approaches are likely to succeed. For example, when television was introduced in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, the religious public opposed it and wanted to prohibit it. Even today, television is still a non-Islamic practice and most
religious Saudis do not use it in their homes. However, computers and the Internet do not face such opposition. The Internet is looked upon as a useful educational tool that can be used to spread Islam. The Internet may also be seen as a controlled medium in that non-Islamic subjects may be filtered.

Another example of a successful non-indigenous tool is the radio, which was introduced prior to the introduction of computers. The radio was never viewed as a prohibited medium, even though songs are prohibited in Islam and the radio could be used to play songs. On the contrary, the radio is fully utilized by Islamic organizations to broadcast Islamic scholars and callers audiotaped speeches and otherwise spread the religion’s guidelines.

One step that must be taken in the introduction of westernized educational approaches within Saudi Arabia is to convince the Ministry of Education of the importance of the approach. Another strategy would be to obtain the input of a panel of experts, including religious officials. A discussion of the approach’s objectives would clarify how the approach intends to benefit society and Islam in general. The panel of experts could determine appropriate
methods by which to teach the alternative approach. Finally, the general public should be included in the introduction of the approach via public media (e.g., newspapers or television).

To summarize, a Western educator cannot expect a target population such as Saudi Arabia to accept unmodified non-indigenous educational approaches, especially when those approaches are tied to a Western identity. Islam functions as an identity and essentially eliminates other ethnic differences. When a non-indigenous approach conflicts with Islam, such approach will be exterminated at its infancy. The next section discusses several difficulties encountered in the implementation of the study.

**Implications of the Methodology**

This case study’s introduction of self-assessment portfolios to the Manarat Al-Sharqiah middle school led to a recognition of the need for alternative methods of teaching and assessment that would complement the current EFL curriculum. First, students understood all aspects of the portfolio process with the exception of questions requiring
creative thinking, for example, “What will you do when you encounter a difficult task?”

In addition, while the study went well overall, the researcher found it difficult to introduce work groups to the classes. The majority of the students did not take group work seriously. Most work groups spent their time laughing, playing, or chatting with each other. Only two groups worked seriously on discussing the difficult items they had indicated in their portfolios, and this focused attention on the task at hand only occurred after the researcher spoke to students in a serious tone of voice, telling those who did not want to participate to leave the class.

The researcher suggests that group discussion may have failed because it had not previously been a part of the EFL curriculum. Students were not accustomed to it. Thus, when students had the opportunity for free discussion of the class materials, they did not take such discussion seriously; it was not part of the curriculum. Moreover, students perceived that the group discussions are not important because it would not be graded.

Limitations of the Study
In addition to the general limitations posed by qualitative research and case study methodology stated previously in chapter 1, the researcher noted additional limitations once data were collected and analyzed. This section presents the limitations of the study.

*Selection of the Study Site*

Case studies such as this one require countless cooperative efforts to be offered by EFL teachers and school administrators. Thus, the researcher conducted a survey a year prior to data collection, during which he observed the foreign language classrooms of the three best private schools in Saudi’s Eastern Province; met with the schools’ principals and EFL teachers; and approached the Eastern Province Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education. The purpose of the survey was to obtain permission to conduct the study and determine what cooperation EFL teachers would provide if their school was selected as the study site.

The researcher selected Manarat Al-Sharqiah as the study’s site on the basis of this school’s size, classrooms, and obvious enthusiasm for the study—the school’s principal
essentially let the researcher know that “the school would be his” and he would be able to do whatever he wanted. Had the researcher obtained more complete information from the EFL teachers of all three schools surveyed, he might have discovered that a school other than Manarat Al-Shargiah would make a more suitable study site. For example, the researcher could have conducted a seminar during which the EFL teachers would develop a written plan of how they would implement the study in their schools. Had he done so, he might have found reason to choose a different school as the study site.

Duration of the Study

The researcher left the US for Saudi Arabia to collect the data on April 29, 2001. He started collecting data on May 1, 2001, and terminated data collection on June 7, 2001, when students were scheduled to begin final exams. Thus, data collection occurred during the five weeks prior to final exams week. This five-week period was a relatively short period in which to implement the self-assessment portfolio process and examine students’ attitudes toward it. Had the researcher been able to collect data from the
beginning of the second semester which began in February, students could have become more familiar with the portfolio process and their responses might have matured. On the other hand, the researcher and the dissertation project’s executive manager analyzed the data and determined that the data collection period was suitable given the nature of the study.

*Grades and Enthusiasm*

Although the EFL teachers at Manarat Al-Sharqiah informed the researcher that they would be able to assign five grades to students based on participation in the study and completion of their portfolios, the researcher discouraged teachers from grading the portfolios—he wanted to minimize the possibility that he might interpret the (graded) data in a biased manner and he did not want to penalize students who did not wish to participate in the study. As a result, some students were reluctant to complete portfolios because such participation had no bearing on their grade. Had the researcher allowed the portfolios to be graded, students might have taken the procedure more seriously and their response rate might have been higher.
**Final Exam Holiday**

Students were not encouraged to attend school during the last two weeks of the second semester; therefore, students’ attendance stopped during these two weeks. The occurrence of the final exam holiday hampered those students who might have used that end-of-semester period to make additional efforts on behalf of their portfolios. (The researcher attended the school site every other day to be available for any student who needed assistance with their portfolios, but no students arrived with questions. The researcher spent the final exam holiday transcribing and translating interviews.)

**Qualitative Research Methodology and Generalization**

The findings of qualitative research are applicable solely to the study’s site and population as these existed at the time the study took place. The present findings can not be generalized to other schools in the Eastern Province or Saudi Arabia generally. However, the researcher tried to provide the reader with several possible interpretations of the findings and connect such findings to other (limited)
research on EFL instruction in Saudi Arabia. The Ministry of Education may choose to apply the present findings in the implementation of self-assessment portfolios at other schools.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this section, the researcher has recommended specific studies that should take place in Saudi Arabia in the future. The discussion includes a description of the format these studies might utilize.

As was described in the previous section, the present study included a five-week data collection period occurring near the end of the semester. It is recommended that the present study be repeated in Saudi EFL classes for a longer duration of time at least one year and that its implementation of self-assessment portfolios be introduced at the onset of the school year rather than near the end of the year. Students may consider their self-assessment portfolios to be as important as the rest of the EFL curriculum if they encounter them at the beginning of the year.
A study of the same students over an extended period of time would enhance understanding of the outcomes of self-assessment portfolio implementation. Such longitudinal research would examine students’ autonomous learning skills and their application of learning strategies they acquired using self-assessment. The study could follow students’ performance in both EFL and other subjects.

While it would be possible to implement the study with students at any grade level, it is suggested that the study utilize participants in the elementary grades. It is further suggested that participants not be chosen from grades beyond that associated with the first year of intermediate schooling.

The study should be conducted with students in private as well as government schools to determine whether students’ commitment to their studies and to self-assessment varies according to the type of school. Participants may include girls as well as boys. The selection of both boys and girls from a variety of schools will allow a broader generalization of the findings. If a variety of students are chosen to participate, the researcher will have to be
especially careful to deal with each of them in an unbiased manner (Mehra, 2001).

Data to be utilized in the study should include documented monthly interviews and students’ self-assessment portfolios, with particular attention being given to students’ weekly learning journals and learning activity logs. Students should be requested to summarize their weekly learning journals by indicating which of the week’s class activities were particularly enjoyable. Such a summary will help students recognize which learning activities work best for them. It is recommended that data collection take place over a period of one (minimum) to three years. A longitudinal study such as that described here will do much to clarify the attitudes of Saudi students towards self-assessment portfolios in EFL (or other) classrooms. The study can be used as a guide for school officials who implement self-assessment portfolios in the future. In addition, students’ reactions to various learning activities can be used in planning changes to the curriculum.

Vocabulary acquisition is a particularly interesting aspect of EFL and merits future study (Read, 2000). According to Read (2000), “vocabulary is typically a more
conscious and demanding process” (p. 1) for all EFL learners regardless of their levels. Research of the past two decades indicates that vocabulary acquisition is viewed by learners as essential to foreign language learning. Learners tend to focus on the memorization of vocabulary words as the means to improve their EFL proficiency. Several participants’ portfolios discussed the learning of new vocabulary words in the present study. A study of the importance of vocabulary on students’ achievements in the EFL classroom would contribute to the EFL field. This researcher suggests that a longitudinal case study be conducted in which EFL students create self-assessment portfolios focusing on the methods they find most helpful in learning vocabulary.

The study’s population should consist of students in the early stages of EFL instruction. It is recommended that the population size be relatively small to facilitate the monitoring of students over time. In addition to implementing self-assessment portfolios, as was done in this present study, the proposed study could include a section on guessing techniques adapted from Parry (1993). The study should utilize both qualitative and quantitative data analysis.
Additional components of the study’s methodology would include the teaching of several strategies related to the encountering of unknown vocabulary. The researcher would then investigate differences among students’ responses to new vocabulary, and students’ EFL test results would be examined to determine the effect of strategy teaching on vocabulary acquisition.

The assessment of vocabulary acquisition should address incidental learning of vocabulary from context as well as systemic learning of vocabulary through memorization of lists of words (Read, 2000). Read suggests that any assessment of vocabulary acquisition should include the ability of learners to make inferences about unknown words; the process that learners engage in when they attempt to infer the meaning of unknown words; and the success of teachers’ coaching on the application of lexical inference strategies.

A follow-up quantitative study could observe students’ test grades to determine the progress of the study proposed above. Results should be viewed based on observing the students attitudes toward vocabulary and EFL test grades, in relation to the EFL curriculum guidelines. This quantitative
study is only to view and measure the outcome of the qualitative research results. As a result, control of variables and assignment of control group to the experimental group is viewed as unnecessary. However, future research may assign control and experimental groups in comparing the results of qualitative—quantitative research. Finally, as was discussed above, the present study found that teacher enthusiasm may affect students’ response to their self-assessment portfolios. A greater percentage of Teacher B’s students turned their portfolios and a greater percentage of portfolios turned in by Teacher B’s students were complete. The researcher had noted that Teacher B, who taught two classes, seemed to be an energetic and enthusiastic teacher. (Some students wrote in their portfolios that Teacher B had the ability to make them learn even when their answers were incorrect.) A study of EFL teachers and parents (who regularly help students with their homework) would yield greater understanding of teachers’ and parents’ influence on students’ learning of EFL.

Summary
The central focus of this descriptive case study was to explore students', teachers', and administrators' attitudes towards the introduction of a non-indigenous instructional strategy, the self-assessment portfolio, within EFL classes at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. The study employed a qualitative methodology. The researcher collected data from students, EFL teachers, and administrators. Data included students' self-assessment portfolios, which contained a background questionnaire, a parent waiver form, weekly learning journals, and a final reaction essay assessing the portfolio procedure; interviews; and the researcher's observations of EFL classes. The researcher conducted interviews as time permitted. In addition to interviewing students, the researcher interviewed the EFL supervisor, the school principal, and a representative of the Eastern Province Directorate of the Saudi Ministry of Education.

The findings of the research are summarized below:

Forty-three of the 81 EFL students who attended eighth grade at Manarat Al-Sharqiah intermediate school chose to turn in self-assessment portfolios. These portfolios
included 33 complete portfolios (complete portfolios contained journal entries for five or more weeks). In turn, the 33 complete portfolios included eight creative portfolios (creative portfolios contained material beyond homework assignments and competed questionnaires). Creative students expressed their creativity both with regard to the portfolio’s physical aspects and with regard to the portfolio’s main purpose. Four students added elaborate color graphics or artwork to their portfolios. The remaining students (four of eight) showed mental creativity in terms of submitting evidence indicating an intensive assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in the learning of English. Twenty-nine (of 81) students were interviewed.

Students were selected for interviews on a random basis. Sixteen interviewees submitted portfolios. Twelve of these 16 portfolios were incomplete; four were considered creative. The majority of student interviewees, whether they submitted portfolios not, indicated they hated final exams and found self-assessment portfolios to be more relaxing, beneficial, or challenging, depending on the interviewee’s proficiency in EFL.
Both EFL teachers suggested the type of assessment encouraged by the self-assessment portfolio would resolve current curriculum limitations. The EFL teachers indicated that the portfolio procedure would encourage weak students to address their problems, find alternative (better) learning styles, and acquire the skills of autonomous learners. Both EFL teachers thought that self-assessment portfolios would challenge both weak and strong students to become creative thinkers.

The three administrators acknowledged that there are negative aspects of teaching styles that encourage memorization and recitation of the curriculum. The administrators would welcome the implementation of the self-assessment portfolio procedure in the future, provided they are presented a framework that details the negatives and positives of such implementation. Moreover, administrators were receptive to viewing additional information on self-assessment portfolio implementation. Administrators acknowledged the benefits of the procedure as a self-reflective tool that supports constructivist teaching and learning (Kitsantas & Baylor, 2001).
Teachers and administrators recognize the anxiety foreign language learners experience during tests and final exams. Barr-Harrison and Horwitz (1994) indicated that tests put psychological pressure on any foreign language student and have the potential to evoke foreign language anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This study found that students who were challenged with EFL felt anxious about their EFL classes and various aspects of language learning. Unfortunately, anxious students did not have the ability to grapple with and eventually learn material they did not understand.

Students in this study indicated that they do not study to learn, rather they accumulate and recite information only to get good grades. Several newspaper articles written during the final exam weeks convey what every family and student go through during that critical period, suggesting the necessity of reforms that can bring some solution to the yearly dilemma in which students anxiously strive to pass exams without consideration for meaningful learning. However, these newspaper articles did not suggest authentic or alternative assessment methods. They focused instead on the need to consider the market, suggesting that officials
consider market demands in their evaluation of students. One market demand is fluency in EFL. Yet, despite years of EFL instruction, students generally perform poorly in EFL due to inadequate teaching and assessment.

Self-assessment portfolios appear to be a solution to current inadequate teaching and learning styles that focus only on memorization and recitation. Self-assessment portfolios will help students obtain skills in analyzing their abilities and remediating their performance deficiencies, and they seem to offer teachers, parents, and officials the ability to prepare a generation capable of critical thinking. Self-assessment portfolios help students to learn material instead of merely memorizing it for the sake of exams. Future implementation of the self-assessment portfolio procedure does not require replacement of the current curriculum with a newer one. The procedure is adaptable to any curriculum.
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Saudi Arabian Information Resources.  


APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Student’s Permission Release Form

My name is Sharif Abdulwahab. As part of my education for a doctoral degree, I am studying the learning process of English during the semester. I will be present in your son’s classroom observing the lessons and talking with the teacher. I would like your permission to read your son’s portfolio (which includes his self-assessment journal) and to talk with him about the things he finds easy and difficult about learning a foreign language. I would also like to give him two short questionnaires to help me understand the learning process. My focus is not on the students’ performance or grade, but on the process of teaching and learning. When I write about my conclusions, I will not report your son's name since he will be given a fictitious name to protect his identity. All information will be confidential.

If you decide to give your permission, please sign below and return the form to the school. If you do not give your
permission, your son's grades and his relationship with the school will not be affected. There is no penalty for deciding not to participate.

You can contact me by calling me at 894-3413 or emailing me at sqw99@hotmail.com.

As a parent of ____________________, I agree to permit my son to participate in the research project conducted by Mr. Abdulwahab. I know that participation is voluntary and my son will not be penalized if he does not participate.

Signed: ________________________  Date: ________________
Appendix B:

Weekly Learning Progress Journal

Student’s Name: Date:

Week #:

A) I learned (List down these points) during the past week:
1-
2-

B) Circle any difficult item or task you mentioned in Item A

C) Why do you think this/those item/s was/were difficult?
1-
2-

D) Can you think of ways to tackle those difficult items?
1-
2-

E) Did you try one of those methods that you thought of before? Describe please.
1-
2-
F) The most interesting/important skill I learned the past week was:
1- 

G) The most interesting thing I learned from class the past week:
1- 
2- 

H) Can you explain why the easy items were easy for you?
1- 
2- 

I) What part of your learning style was changed from previous weeks?
1- 
2- 

J) I think I should work more on:
1- 
2- 

K) I think I can solve those problems/weaknesses by doing the following (estimate time to achieve your goal):
1- 
2-
H) List down the vocabulary you enjoyed learning this week and WHY:

1-  2-  4-  5-  6-  7-  8-  9-

I) List down the vocabulary you did not like learning this week and WHY?

1-  2-  4-  5-
Appendix C:

Arabic Translation Of Weekly Learning Progress Journal

Name:  Date:  Week #:  Class: 2

لماذا اختارت تلك الورقة أو الواجب أو القطعة لتعرضها كعمل مهم لك هذا الأسبوع؟

إن المعلومات الرائدة التي قرأتها الأسبوع الماضي كانت؟

ما هي في اعتقادات صعوبة تلك الفقرة ... الفقرات.

أعتقد أنني أستطيع إيجاد الحل لتلك المشكلة وذلك يعمل الآلي؟

لم أحب الآتي في الأسبوع الماضي (الكتاب أو القواعد أو القراءة أو الكتابة)؟

أعتقد أنه يجب أن أبذل المزيد من الوقت في الآتي؟

هل جربت أي طريقة من الطرق السابقة التي قررت فيها من قبل: أشرح كيف.

إن أهم مهارة دراسية تعلمتها الأسبوع الماضي كانت؟

أفضل درس أو فترة تعلمتها الأسبوع الماضي كانت؟

ما هي التغييرات التي حدثت لك نتيجة ما تعلمتة من معلومات ومهارات الأسبوع الماضي؟

هل هناك أيّة أفكارات أخرى؟
Appendix D:

NUD*IST Coding Sample
Appendix E:

Background Questionnaire Form

Name: Date: / /2001 DOB:

Age:

Please answer the following questions. All the information you provide in this questionnaire will be confidential. You can write additional information in the back with reference to the question number.

1. When did you start using English?
1. When did you start learning English?
2. Have you practiced English abroad (i.e., UK)?
3. How many hours per day do you practice English in general?
4. Can you speak English comfortably, and Why?
5. Can read English comfortably, and Why?
6. What difficulties do you face when you read English?
7. Do you keep a diary of your learning activities?
8. How do you look up a new or strange word?
9. How do you learn new vocabulary?
10. Do you keep a diary of the new vocabulary you learn?
11. How many hours do you spend doing your daily school homework?

12. How many hours do you spend doing your daily English homework?

13. Do you read any English material you find handy (i.e., advertisements) and WHY?

14. How many hours a day do you think you read English besides your homework?

15. Do you have favorite newspaper or magazine to read?

16. If yes number 15, What is the language?
Appendix F:

Students Interview Questions

Student Name:     Age:     Class: 2
Date: 5/01 Time:

Ice breaking

1. Did you enjoy using portfolios? WHY
2. What did you understand from the Portfolio process so far:
3. What did you learn in that process?
4. Was it exhausting?
5. Did you choose any risk in answering or choosing an element in the Portfolio
6. If you have to choose between portfolio and test for grading, which will you choose and WHY
7. Have you ever used similar assessment methodology in the past
8. Would you like to choose this kind assessment next year, Why

Do you watch TV? Weekdays: ___hrs, Weekends & Holidays _____hrs
Dad: Works_____, Reads_______, What________
Mom: Works_____, Reads_______, What________
Parents read to U: Yes    NO    what:
Do You read besides school work: What
Have you ever borrowed books from the school?:
Appendix G:

Teachers Interview Questions

I, ___________________________ agree to be interviewed and taped and the researcher provides full protection of the identity of the interviewee as per The Ohio State University research laws.

Affiliation: Position: Signature:  
Address: City: Zip:  
Telephone: Email (optional):  

Introduction:

1. Have you every heard of assessment? If yes, What are those?

2. Have you ever heard of Portfolio assessment?

3. Do you think this type of assessment would work in your school/s? WHY

4. If you were to apply this type of portfolio I applied, would you use it with modifications? What??

5. Do you have any suggestion for the assessment improvement at your school and in Saudi Arabia in general?

6. Give your business card and take their telephones
Appendix H:

School Principal Interview

I, agree to be interviewed and taped and the researcher provides full protection for the identity of the interviewee as per The Ohio State University research laws.

Affiliation:
Position: Signature:
Address: City:
Zip: Telephone:

Email (optional):

Introduction:

1- What type of testing/assessment procedures do you follow in your school?

2- What are the testing standards of the ministry?

What is the status of a private school from your point of view as a principle?

2.1- I noticed that your school as a private schools teach the courses as the government school. However, I noticed that you are more stringent in applying and teaching the curriculum, in addition to following the students. Does that mean we can reach a conclusion that private schools teach the Ministry curriculum with more carefulness than the government school.

3- Have you ever heard of assessment? If yes, what are those?
3.1- So what is difference between the Saudi student behaviors towards E in private and government schools?

3.2- But, do you think that there are students who face difficulties even if they have studied E from the first grade at a private school?

4- Do you have any suggestion for the assessment improvement at your school and in Saudi Arabia in general?

4.1- Do you have any suggestion on the on-going assessment?

5- Have you ever heard of Portfolio assessment?

5.1 What is the difference between testing and assessment? And, can we say the test is not reliable?

6- Do you think this type of assessment would work in your school/s? WHY

6.1- What is the best grade to implement this type of assessment?

7- Can You draw a Province plan to implement portfolio assessment?

8- Do you feel that students in general motivated for studying?

8.1- So, can we say the old days students were more motivated than now?

8.2- I noticed that the current students parents are the one who teach their students. However, it was the students job in the old days?

8.3- So, if we give the students few questions such as those I used in the portfolio will lead the student to open the book to search for the information?

9- What are the students behaviors regarding school in general?

10- Do you think students know how to set a goal and work for it i.e. future goals?
11- What are some of the challenges students face in their schools in EFL?

11.1- What about the E status as we have seen in the past when comparing E to the atheists and non-believers. This of course add more stress to the students. Do you notice similar views now as in the past?
Appendix I:

Eastern Province Directorate Interview Questions

I, agree to be interviewed and taped and the researcher provides full protection of the identity of the interviewee as per The Ohio State University research laws.

Affiliation:
Position: Signature:

Address: _______________City:
Zip:

Telephone: (966__) - Email (optional):

Introduction: 5-8 Minutes

1- What type of testing/assessment procedures do you follow in your district schools?

2- What are the testing standards of the ministry?

3- Do you have any suggestion for the assessment improvement in Saudi Arabia?
4- Have you ever heard of Portfolio assessment?

5- Do you think this type of assessment would work in your school/s? WHY

6- Can you draw a Province plan to implement portfolio assessment?

7- Do you think students know how to set a goal and work for it i.e. future goals?

8- What are some of the challenges students face in their schools in EFL?
Appendix J:

EFL Teachers’ Orientation About Portfolio Assessment

What is portfolio Assessment and Self-Assessment?

Feeling positive towards my own work.

Portfolio assessment engages students in the activity of setting a goal of improvement by recognizing the process and the context of the activity. Foreign language students become engaged learners of English when they understand the functions of in a learning environment. When learners are involved and responsible in collecting and answering classroom requirements and objectives, they learn to be independent and autonomous learners. Portfolio provides rich information regarding the curriculum since it triggers students to react to the intricacies of learning. Portfolio also provides students with the capability to search and accumulate required knowledge and skills for the subject or the task. The advantages of portfolio may be expressed in term of what it focusses upon: focus on process instead of product, focus on long time progress evaluation instead of
one time test or a circle on a Scantron sheet, focus on self evaluation process instead of someone else’s opinion in evaluation, focus on several types of tests instead of one form of test, focus on long-term attention of the portfolio stages instead of just paying attention to the final product, and focus on collaborative efforts of students, teachers, and books instead of individual effort.

Portfolio assessment triggers teachers to develop more challenging materials that engage students to demonstrate what they know. The implementation of portfolio use requires teachers and students to understand the criteria towards which they are giving. Bonilla-Brown suggested that students improve their performance when they are encouraged to establish the standards on how to evaluate their portfolios. Those standards may become internalized in student classroom activities which, in turn, offer the students the responsibility to define and identify their work performance in cooperation with their instructors.

Any student’s work is heavily affected by variables that may be based on background-culture. In Saudi Arabia, students’ fear of English escalates when the students cannot respond to certain assignments. Several factors may cause
Saudis to fear English class such as the disagreement between home-culture and the target culture, the FL culture (Lambert, 1975). Therefore, the portfolio may provide a tool to bridge students’ background culture with the L2 classroom since it will allow the FL students to express their feelings about the problem and provide supportive solutions that may be the key answer to their questions. Brindley (1990) suggested different forms of assessment such as self-assessment as one form of assessment that is appropriate within the learner-centered educational philosophy. This type of assessment encourages students to document their feedback on the process of learning. Students learn how to critique the content in addition to their learning process. When FLLs obtain self-support to their efforts, self-feedback that is obtained through self-assessment, they tend to feel positive towards their learning since it is a process-oriented learning outcome (McGregor, 1991). Students select samples to include in the portfolio that represent their learning progress. In the later stages of developing the portfolio, students feel a sense of ownership of the portfolio because they consider it as a project they worked hard to accomplish. The teacher, on
the other hand, only has control over the process of selecting and contributing pieces to the portfolio. Portfolio supports student-centered learning and helps to acquire successful learning strategies in early stages. Shores and Grace proposed ten systematic process steps for teachers to ensure successful attainment of a portfolio procedure. The ten-step processes is as follows: (1) establish a portfolio policy; (2) collect work samples; (3) shoot photographs; (4) use learning logs; (5) interview children; (6) take systematic records; (7) take anecdotal records; (8) prepare narrative reports; (9) conduct three way conference; and (10) prepare pass-along portfolios. As a result, it can be assumed that portfolios encourage risk-taking and support a creative educational environment. There are different types of portfolios. The most common types are the Showcase Portfolio, the Record Keeping Portfolio, and the Working Portfolio.

Showcase Portfolio is a collection of students’ work such as paintings. Students choose what they want to add in the portfolio and arrange it in a presentable fashion. The second kind of portfolio is Record Keeping Portfolio. This type of portfolio is similar to a diary of a particular
class. The Student is responsible of the writing of class notes and accumulating them in the portfolio. The teacher does not interfere with the students in the kind of record the students make or the way students accumulate those records. One of the benefit of WP: Students and teachers work together in the Working Portfolio to assess and evaluate Portfolio teaches learners to be responsible for monitoring their learning process, progress, and success, which can be regarded as a successful technique of assessment and learning as well.

Finally, the working portfolio style, which involves developing portfolio, focuses on the coherence of the students' and teachers' efforts to collect and accumulate the portfolio so it benefits the students. Students and teachers work together in the Working Portfolio to assess and evaluate students' work. Students select samples to include in the portfolio that represent their learning progress. In the later stages of developing the portfolio, students feel a sense of ownership of the portfolio because they consider it as a project they worked hard to accomplish. The teacher, on the other hand, only has control
over the process of selecting and contributing pieces to the portfolio.
Appendix K:

Map Of Saudi Arabia

The research site
Appendix L:

Teacher Permission Form
Appendix M:

Copy of Office of Research Risks Protection Permission at the Ohio State University

April 25, 2001

Dr. Saleh Aldossary
Directorate of the Ministry of Education in the Eastern Province, KSA
Dammam, Saudi Arabia

Dear Dr. Aldossary,

My name is Jane Kelsey. I work for The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, USA. Mr. Sharif al-Abdulwahab, who is enrolled in one of the University's graduate programs, would like to conduct a research study in an intermediate school in Khobar, Saudi Arabia. The University has asked Mr. al-Abdulwahab to provide a letter from the Ministry of Education, showing that you have agreed to allow him to conduct his research in the school in Khobar.

Mr. al-Abdulwahab can provide the letter to the University after he completes his research and returns to the United States.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

(Ms.) Jane Kelsey
Office of Research Risks Protection

Phone: (614)292-6950
Fax: (614) 688-0366
E-mail: kelsey.18@osu.edu
Internet: http://www.orrp.osu.edu
Appendix N:

Copy of the Saudi Ministry of Education Permission in Eastern Province
Appendix O:

The Ministry of Education Assessment Objectives:

The idea of assessment project was due to basic principles for example: correct the common understanding of tests was common in the past, unfortunately. The goal influenced indirectly on education to be insufficient which led to the increase of students' anxiety and fear of tests and finals. This new assessment bylaw with all objectives and proceedings it contains remains part of the educational process. The new assessment bylaw will not achieve its objectives to overhaul the educational process unless the workers in general and the teachers in specific fully understand the aims and the objectives of education. Also, the assessment bylaw should be looked at as an assistant tool to reach the above mentioned aims and objectives. Workers and teachers need to communicate these objectives into practical assessment tools surrounded with fairness, validity, and consistency (P. 2 by the Supreme Council Deputy for Educational Policies).
Bylaw no. 2

The main objective of the assessment bylaw is to regulate assessment methods of the students’ achievement in his different formal stages of education, and to ensure the success of the educational process through the following:

Determine the student’s achievement and verify his progress to reach the Ministry’s policies principles, objectives, and aims.

Support the student and the responsible staff with the necessary information that seek to improve the level of education, enhance teaching procedures and methods, and upgrade the current curriculum.

Bylaw no 3.

General basis to be consider in student assessment:

Assessment methods, procedures, practices, tools, or results should not stress and fear the students, which may negatively influence the educational process.

The assessment methods should be valid and a true representative of what is expected from the student to learn the information and skills. The tools should represent the student’s aptitude of the class and reflect the student’s
abilities in regard of what he learned. In addition to the class basic knowledge check, the assessment instrument should reflect the student’s capability to solve problems, use appropriate thinking process, and indicate if the student is a self-and-an-ongoing-learner, and other mental processes.
Appendix P:

A Sample Reflection Paper

Evidence of improvement
Evidence of efforts
Quality of self-evaluation
Range of projects
Presentation
Future goals

You may discuss these issues with anyone and then write about them with a paragraph each. Please provide your own feedback about these issues.
Appendix Q:

Field Notes

Date: May 3, 2001  Note#: 1  Subject:

The school shape is like a U shape with an uncovered open space in the middle of the U. the middle school is on the left side of the U. the school contain elementary, preparatory and high school. Every stage students cannot interact with the other stage. For example, preparatory students are in the second floor where there is a door that is always looked so high school students cannot go inside when they use the stairs. However, they interact in the breaks since they share the same open space.

The classes start at 7 with 2 breaks at 8:30 to 8:45 and from 10:15 to 10:45. Then the students have another break after the sixth period for prayers. After that break, they attend one period only before they leave for the day at 1:30PM.

Date: May 6, 2001  Note#: 2  Subject:
I found that one of the E teachers is not interested and I did not feel that his heart is into employing this new strategy. Ever time we speak or discuss an issue, he gets ready to leave so he can attend and teach a class or goes to the copying machine. There is something he has to do. I also observed that he does not add or suggest to how and what the portfolio process was going though. With all honesty, Mr. Ghalib is trying his best to accomplish the project.

Date: May 16, 2001    Note#: 4    Subject:

Students in the break are rowdy and try to escape from the door or jump the 10’ fenced. Teachers try come at the end of every period to direct them to go back to their classes where they hear the bill ringing for the end of the period. It’s so hot and sunny where they sit. They gather at the artificially carpeted grass to eat their sandwiches where there is no shade. Others play soccer too. The size is a midsize soccer field with no tracks for running. It’s also not shaded. Walkways are shaded and some students sit there too. You still can hear some rowdy students back inside even ten minutes after the start of the 5th period which started right after the second break.
I heard some students bragging about next week. Students celebrating outside the premises by squeaking their car wheels and driving fast in a narrow school street where are parked in both directions. I saw a suburban seeking wheels and driver take sharp turns so the wheels sound off. I was scared that the driver loses control and hit my car or cause a disaster. I could also see several students outside who managed to escape with their bags. For example, they run their bags through the fence since there is a gap of 6" between steel beams of the fence. Then, they ask the guard to go to their cars or the driver’s car to get something. Then they leave with the escaped bags.

I entered the classes and some students were making fin of what I say to other students. The teacher and took a firm position to that students and asked him to leave or be polite and stay. I found the return rate very low that day. Then, I took the names of the students so they know that they’re getting gifts. Some immediately said they will bring
it tomorrow. The main goal of entering to that class was to collect the portfolios and see if the students had any question regarding the project.

The teacher then asked me to explain what’s going to happen to the collected data. I explained that I will enter what I you wrote to the PC software then I start putting themes to the topics you mentioned. Then, students asked me why am I doing this here? I explained to them that its out of my courteously to teach you a way to think of how to express yourself rather than pleasing someone else e.g. the teacher to your parents.

I felt the teacher had nothing to do and wanted me to explain in details the benefits, which I did. The teacher did not teach at that lesson. The students looked as if they were used to enjoy time when a visitor visit them. The students did not ask me any question of the results or how they can improve themselves and acted as if they know what’s going on. I noticed that day that the students who acted as if they know everything about the research were less aware of the real objectives of the research. However, the students who asked more questions and asked me questions of why I do this seemed to be more aware of the objectives of
the research. The students did not get out any paper or note to write down any note which amazed me of how will they take notes or if they are aware of that skill as an important skill when they listen to someone. Also, the students in class B were characterized as the most troublesome students by the teacher and the deputy.

The deputy Saudi that the students don’t understand anything form the first time and you have to repeat everything 2-4 times so they understand. They don’t understand what you say unless they want to hear that subject i.e. soccer game or soccer players. He said that the students have to be driven by the stick so they listen.

The DEP mentioned that private lessons time is now in this week before the finals next week. So many teachers now earn gold by teaching physics, chemistry etc... While sitting in the deputy’s office, he told me that they won the national championship on Quran Contest of Manarat Alsharqiah schools nationwide which include Qasim, Riyadh, and Jeddah districts. The students beat Riyadh in the final contest and the school was so happy.

I noticed that the deputy is very religious and he and all the teachers had beards and seemed religious in their
practices. I did not notice any teacher who is not praying for example.

Date: May 21, 2001     Note#: 6     Subject:

While I was leaving the school at 10AM, one student asked me why I did not do my research on them, 9 graders instead of 8th graders. I said I followed the EFL teacher’s recommendation. He said why I said the EFL teacher told me that 8th graders will be more cooperative than 9th graders. He said no, we would love to do it. I asked him what did you hear I did? He said he heard that I asked the student to answer questions that help them to review before the final. He then asked me of which is better, study here or in the US? I said in Saudi is better. He immediately said by what about the way of teaching. I said yes, in the US they will stimulate you to think but this adds more work to you. He that’s better than having to follow the teacher everywhere he goes so you get a grade or two, or you cannot disagree with the teacher. I asked so what if you disagreed with the teacher? He said he will haunt me on my grades. They deputy shouted to another teacher who was standing by the gate.
stopping students from leaving the school. The conversation broke at that moment.

Date: May 22, 2001        Note#: 7        Subject:

It was a day before the last day of the last week of the school and all intermediate students of the three grades gathered in 2 classrooms because the absenteeism is very high. In the first break, students gathered in the soccer field and started eating beans which was brought from outside cafeteria which serve beans and freshly baked breads. This was brought by students who escaped school. The students who were eating are my students had asked me to join there where I did. I sat on the ground with my white Thoub and ate with them and talked about the school. I asked them if they eat everyday like that. They said no but we’d love to because the school cafeteria sucks. I told them how does a school cafeteria look like in the US. They said we’d dream of having something like that. So, I asked them if this would help you in your school performance. They said yes of course. I asked why? (my typical question). They said because we’d feel relaxed and comfortable eating instead of sitting under the sun and being in this heat because we feel
tired afterwards. Temp at that time was reaching over a hundred degree F without heat index. I asked them why you don’t stay inside, they said we are not allowed and we are forced to leave the building by the teachers in breaks except prayer’s break.

Date: May 28, 2001       Note#: 8       Subject:

The EFL teacher is becoming very angry since I came to the school. However, another student said no, he’s always angry before the exams. The teacher in that week was writing down the final examination and seemed stressed but not showing anything in front of me, even though it was obvious on his face.
Sample Lesson from the Ministry Textbook (Unit 15, lesson four)

Who had the most money?
Read the passage. Then answer the questions in your copybook.

A butcher, a grocer and a tailor all worked in the same street. In the morning, they had 100 riyals each.

The butcher spent 90 riyals at the tailor’s. The grocer spent 60 riyals at the butcher’s. The tailor spent 80 riyals at the grocer’s.

In the afternoon, they counted their money. Who had the most money?
Appendix S:

Sample Lesson: The Ministry Student Textbook (Unit 15, lesson three)
Appendix T:

EFL Teacher-Textbook Recommendations

TEACHERS!
Before you start teaching, please read this. We hope it will help you.

This course
There are many different ways of teaching English. Some courses teach through grammar. In other courses, English is taught through topics (like "carpets" or "football"). A third kind of course teaches through language functions (like "asking directions"). In courses which are based on topics or functions, grammar is used as it is needed.

This course uses all three ideas. The grammar is carefully controlled but the pupils use English to communicate. So the first books do not try to explain English grammar. Pupils see sentences in diagrams and tables. They are shown "time lines" to help them understand past time (\( \frac{1}{3} \)), present time (\( \frac{1}{2} \)), and future time (\( \frac{2}{3} \)). However, they do not see words like nouns or verb until the later books.

In some courses, pupils are expected to master structures and vocabulary completely within a short time after they are introduced. In this course, however, your pupils will meet new words and structures again and again, over a longer period of time. The more general skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are also developed gradually. DON'T EXPECT YOUR PUPILS TO LEARN EVERYTHING PERFECTLY THE FIRST TIME THEY MEET IT. Revision and recycling are planned into the course.

For the second year, each pupil has (1) a pupils' book, and (2) a workbook. For the teachers there is (1) a teacher's book for each year, (2) a set of posters, and (3) a cassette tape.

There are 24 units. Each unit is divided into four 45-minute lessons. Five weeks of the course are set aside for revision—in Units 12, 13 and 24, and following Units 6 and 18. Four tests—covering material in Units 1–6, 1–12, 13–18 and 1–24—are provided at the end of this book. You may duplicate and administer them as they are (provided they can be kept secure), or you may use them as models for tests you construct yourself. In addition, there are practice tests for Units 1–6, 1–12 and 13–18 in the workbooks, supported by notes in this book.

There is space in the workbook for all the exercises the pupils are asked to do. Extra spaces are provided at the back of the book. In addition, there are remedial handwriting exercises for those pupils who need it. However, you may still want your pupils to copy books. These could be used, for example, for the copying and dictation work that you give them.

Your teacher's book contains step-by-step descriptions of each lesson along with reduced reproductions of every page from the pupils' book and workbook.

Although some flash cards are provided, you will need to make most of them yourself.
INTRODUCTION

Recommendations

1. Use your teacher's book—correctly!

You cannot teach this course from the pupils' books. Some lessons do not use the pupils' books at all. Posters are used a lot for speaking practice. Flash cards are needed to help with reading. This teacher's book will tell you what to teach and will recommend how to teach it. But you cannot teach, either, by reading the full teacher's notes in the classroom. This would take up class time that you should be using to improve your pupils' English. It would mean lessons full of gaps, lessons without pace or direction, in which your pupils' attention would wander. That could easily lead to dissatisfied pupils, a breakdown in discipline and poor results.

2. Active preparation is needed.

You must know what you are going to teach and how you are going to do it BEFORE YOU GO INTO EACH LESSON. To do this, you must read and understand the detailed notes in this book, then make your own notes. A box has been provided for these next to the objectives for each lesson. (An example of the box as it might look for Unit 1, lesson 3 is shown to the right.) Your notes should remind you in class what to do, how and when to do it, and what you need. Remember to include the actual time during the lesson when a new activity should begin. Use your watch in class to check that you are keeping close to the time allowed. For example, in Unit 1, lesson 3, the time you have for activity A is 5 minutes. If your lesson begins at 8.20, you should write 8.25 next to your own note for activity B. This will help you to do everything in each lesson in the right amount—not too much and not too little. It will also stop you falling behind in the course.

NOTE: With previous courses you were required to make up lesson plans which were checked by your supervisor. In this course, lesson plans are prepared for you and you do not need to make your own. Find out if your supervisor requires more than a summary for each lesson, like the one described in part 2 (above).

Notes:

Unit 2. Lesson 1

8.20 (Greet class) Give dictation.
8.25 Revise personal questions.
Use flash cards. Pupils may ask for meanings.
How do you say that?
What does that mean?
PB page 3: have pupils read aloud.
8.40 Go over homework WB p2. Pair work.
Have pupils fill in questionnaire bottom p2.
Have pupils ask for spellings.
How do you spell that?
Set homework: Learn Qs and As from box 5 on PB p4. For dict next lesson.
8.50 Pupils read aloud from flashcards.

sample lesson notes
3. Start as you mean to go on!
Make your pupils work hard in class. Do this from Unit 1, Lesson 1. There is a lot of classwork and homework in all units. This will help your pupils get used to working hard. Normally, the course plans for pupils to spend from 10 to 20 minutes on a homework exercise. So, expect them to complete the homework you set. Pupils usually try to please teachers who work hard and who expect their pupils to do the same. In return, you must check their work often. Remember, it is better to check a little work frequently than a lot of work infrequently.

4. Speak English!
You may be the only English speaker some of your pupils will hear, so speak as much of it as possible! Be sure to use English from the very first day, and expect pupils to use the language for classroom situations. Occasionally you may need to use Arabic. However, you should do this rarely. It should surprise your pupils to hear you speak Arabic. Use English to organize classroom activities and to give regular instructions. After you use the English words, do not give those instructions in Arabic again.

5. Talk less than your pupils!
You do not need practice speaking English. Your pupils do. After modelling structures, try to conduct drills by pointing to pictures and pupils rather than by repeating sentences yourself. Pair work is good for this. Some teachers do not like pair work. Perhaps they think that pupils will not do it. Do a little of it as often as possible. This will probably work better than trying long paired tasks. For example, after pupils have practised a question and answer drill across the class, a short period of pair work will give more practice to more pupils. Pair work should also be included in lessons to give pupils the chance to apply what they have practised.

6. Don’t waste time!
When you enter the classroom, begin the first activity immediately. When you want a pupil to speak, choose one quickly. Have pupils remain seated when they answer. Do not waste useful time by looking at pupils’ raised hands, listening to calls of “Sir! Sir!” or watching pupils noisy standing up or sitting down. Remember: pupils may meet English only in your lessons. So make the best use of every minute.

7. Give every pupil a chance.
This is especially important at the start of a course. Some pupils are very quiet. Some at the back think they have been forgotten. Do not allow this to happen. Use choral repetitions and responses to help all the pupils. Choose different pupils each time for individual repetition and response. Try to give a
pupil a task you know he can do. For example, weaker pupils can be encouraged if they are asked to give answers after others have given model answers.

8. Focus pupils’ attention!

Before coming to class, make sure your recorder, cassette tape, posters and flash cards are ready to use. You will lose your pupils’ attention if you spend time arranging these things in class. Once in class, make sure that every activity has a focus and that your pupils know what that focus is. For example, if you are using a poster, make the class close their books and look at the poster. If you are giving a demonstration, make sure they are watching you. Some kinds of activities have no real focus for pupils. For instance, what do pupils do if you spend a long time writing sentences on the board during class time? A clear focus in every activity keeps pupils alert and interested.

9. Give classroom instructions in English!

Use words like Listen, Look, Stop, Say, Read, and Write from the start. Others are taught in this course (e.g., Unit 2), but you can add more, e.g., Stop talking, Exchange your books, Write neatly, Stop writing. After you use the English words, do not give those instructions in Arabic again.

10. Encourage pupils who answer—even if they are wrong.

Words like Right, Good, Fine for correct answers and Nearly, and Not quite for incorrect ones will encourage pupils to try again. Allow pupils to correct mistakes—their own and their classmates’. This helps learning. Does the teacher in the picture agree with these ideas? What is the result?

11. Drilling is not everything!

For teaching new language, think of four steps:

1. presenting (through posters, miming, etc.);
2. practising (e.g., repetitions and question/answer drills);
3. applying (e.g., guessing games, information gap activities); and
4. revising and recycling.

Some teachers stop after practising (step 2). Pupils must have the chance to use new language for a purpose. Otherwise they will soon forget it. A pupil might want to tell you this:

When I hear words, I often forget them.
When I repeat words, I sometimes repeat them without thinking.
When I have to use words, I usually understand and remember them.

So, after presenting and practising new language items, allow pupils to feel that they are using them to communicate. Activities like this are built into the course at different stages, though this is not always done in the same lesson as the presentation or the practice.

12. Make sure you finish the final activity!

The final activity may be just as important as any other one in the lesson. Try your best to finish it within the class period. If you cannot, then come back to it the following day. Make sure you leave enough time to introduce the homework.
13. Encourage pupils to use the revision pages!

Revision pages are included at the end of each unit in the pupils' book. They are summaries of the main points of the units. Your pupils should get into the habit of studying them regularly—especially before exams. In every unit of this teacher's book we have tried to suggest ways you might use the revision pages with your pupils. Sometimes we have suggested classwork. Sometimes we have suggested homework. There may be some reading or some writing or some learning by heart. When the work is to learn something by heart, there is always a recommendation about testing it. These activities should never take more than two or three minutes, but they will help your pupils to keep the revision pages in mind so that they can use them for themselves if necessary.

14. Follow the handwriting model!

When you write on the board or in a pupil's book, make your letters and numbers like the ones you are teaching. You may find this difficult at first. Just remember that it is for the good of the pupils. You will soon get used to it.

15. Tell your pupils about the importance of English.

English is spoken by hundreds of millions of people around the world. It is spoken and understood in more countries around the world than any other language. It is spoken in people's homes, as well as in shops, offices, and schools. It is used on the radio and TV. It is the language spoken by captains of ships and air Planes. Without a common single language, it would be very dangerous to fly. English is learnt in schools all over the world. Many universities require their students to be able to use English well. It helps students to get good degrees. Most modern scientists read and write in English; businessmen use English to talk to other businessmen from different countries; and it is the main language of the United Nations.

If pupils travel to countries outside the Arab world, they will need to understand, speak, read and write English. In many offices, shops and cafes in Saudi Arabia there are people who speak English. Tell your pupils to practise their English whenever they can, for more success in school and in their lives.

We wish you success!
Appendix U:

Model of Self-Assessment Portfolio Framework

Establishment of Self-Assessment Portfolios Process

Instructional objectives

Matching task to

Generating Evaluation

Management of

Progress Monitor

Process Evaluation
Appendix V:

Proposed Continuous Weekly Self Assessment


Please answer the following questions in the best possible way you feel.

1. In this week's lessons, I have studied/practiced/worked on...
   (a)----------------------
   (b)----------------------
   (c)----------------------
   (d)----------------------
   (e)----------------------
   (f)----------------------

Fill in the empty spaces with topics and areas of study that are relevant in your case, for example (a)
pronunciation of words containing the sound theta, (b) how to great people, (c) questions with do/does.

LEAVE OUT VOCABULARY ('NEW WORDS) HERE; this will be practiced in item 4 below.

2. How well do you master the topics you mentioned above?

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3. Reaction, how do you find the above topics (item 1) important to your personal needs?

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4. I/We have also studied new words of the following subject area(s):

Write in Arabic if you find it easier

(a)------------------------ ----------------------

309
5. How well do you know the above vocabulary (areas) according to your own estimate?

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6. Reacting to this week, to what extent do you find the above type of vocabulary (areas) important in relation to your own personal needs?

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7. Summarizing the last few lessons you studied last week, I feel I have learned the following:

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8. Last week, I realized that I have to change my study habits/ learning style/ priorities in the following way:

(a) 
(b) 
(c) 

9. I think my weak point/s are the following:

(a) 
(b) 
(c) 

10. I want to see instructions in the next week lessons to focus on the following teaching points/skills, areas:

(a) 
(b) 
(c) 

Further Comments: