

ASSESSMENT THROUGH STUDENT PORTFOLIOS IN OMANI SCHOOLS

A THESIS IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

Why do Omani teachers not use student portfolios as effective alternative tools of assessment? Why do they only depend on traditional testing to evaluate students' progress in the English language? Although the Ministry of Education in Oman asks English teachers to use student portfolios as another way to assess students' skills besides testing, many teachers mainly use tests and look at portfolios simply as folders that keep students' work safely. In fact, there is a lot of research on student portfolios as an alternative assessment to measure students' achievement and strengths, but there are no specific research studies on why Omani teachers, in particular, are not convinced that using student portfolios is a serious means of assessment like traditional testing.

Much literature supports the value of using portfolios in improving students' work and growth in the target language and emphasizes that portfolios can be used in any kind of program or school. Many studies have found that use of student portfolios is one of the best methods of assessing students because portfolios involve students in their own learning. The purpose of this study was to investigate why so many Omani teachers are not using student portfolios as an additional means of assessment beside traditional testing to evaluate students' growth and progress, as well as to address the following questions: What are students' attitudes toward using portfolios as a second means of assessment? Do English supervisors support teachers to use student portfolios effectively? And do parents look positively upon student portfolios as a supportive tool of assessment? Surveys and interviews with Omani students, teachers, parents, and supervisors were used.

The findings indicate that the four participating groups all believe in the power of portfolios in assessing students continuously. However, although parents preferred their children to be assessed mainly through test results, students preferred to have personal portfolios containing their work. In addition, heavy schools duties, a big number of students in each class, lack of caring of both parents and students, not receiving any encouragement or support from supervisors, and lack of knowledge about how to assess students through portfolios are the main reasons that hindered teachers from using portfolios in Omani schools. Thus, there is a need for training courses and workshops that may guide them in using portfolios in the assessment process.

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DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my lovely wife. Her encouragement and support gave me the determination and patience to finish this job.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Much research has been done so far on the importance of student portfolios as a measure of students' progress in the English language. However, there have not been any studies that relate to the use of student portfolios specifically in Omani schools. This research is an attempt to understand the position of Omani English teachers about using student portfolios in the assessment process. The results of this research study reveal the reasons why Omani teachers do not use student portfolios during the assessment periods at the end of each semester.

This study provides insight into teachers' attitudes, supervisors' viewpoints, and students' and parents' opinions about the use of student portfolios in the assessment process. This research gives useful information to teachers about the importance of portfolios in teaching, learning, and assessment. Additionally, this research helps English supervisors, who implement the policies of the English Language Department in the Ministry of Education in Oman, to understand the negative attitudes of Omani teachers towards student portfolios and suggests ways to change these negative attitudes. Thus, this study provides essential information not only to Omani English teachers, but also to officials at the Ministry of Education.

Research Questions/Assumptions

In the Omani school where I work, English teachers have become used to using only traditional testing to assess students' abilities and skills in the English language. They do not have the habit of applying other alternative tools in assessing learners' progress. During the last three years, the English Language Department of the Ministry of Education in Oman has asked English teachers to use other continuous assessment tools such as student portfolios as an alternative means of assessment besides testing. However, Omani English teachers are not sure of the power of portfolios in assessing their students. They often consider student portfolios as just a file or a folder that keeps students' written work without following any systematic method. Usually some Omani teachers ask their

students to collect their work in a folder randomly, and then the teacher does not bother even using this portfolio during the assessment process. At the end of each academic year or semester, the teachers then only look at test results to evaluate students' achievements in the English language.

Research suggests that using student portfolios as an alternative means of assessment effectively can enhance both teaching and learning. Also, assessing students through portfolios can result in several advantages over traditional testing, not only for students, but also for teachers themselves (see Brown & Hudson, 1998; Koskinen, 1994; Macias, 1995; MacLeod, 2005; Shaaban, 2001). This thesis seeks to find out the reasons for ignoring student portfolios in Omani schools by teachers as an effective way of continuous assessment. More specifically, it attempts to explain why Omani teachers are not using student portfolios as an additional means of assessment beside traditional testing to evaluate students' growth and progress. This study also tries to answer the following sub-questions: (1) What are students' attitudes toward using portfolios as a second means of assessment? (2) Do English supervisors support teachers to use student portfolios effectively? (3) Do parents look positively upon student portfolios as a supportive tool of assessment?

Data were collected from multiple sources in order to gain insight into these questions. Quantitative data from surveys with teachers, supervisors, students, and parents, as well as qualitative data from interviews with the above mentioned groups were used.

A General View of the Assessment System in Omani Schools

A few years ago, the English Department in the Ministry of Education in Oman published a new assessment document for grades 1-12. For grades 1-4, there is no semester one or semester two, but just one whole academic year. The overall mark is 100% through continuous assessment without any class tests or semester tests. However, teachers can have 10-minute quizzes, and each quiz should focus only on one of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Teachers write three descriptive reports for parents in Arabic during the year and one full report at the end of the year using letter grades only without marks for each skill. Pupils pass directly

to the next level without any failure or re-sitting exams. During the whole year, each pupil individually or in a small group should do only one English project.

For grades 5-9, the academic year is divided into two semesters with one descriptive report each. The overall mark is 100 divided as 70 marks for continuous assessment and 30 marks for the end of semester test. Teachers have to have six informal class tests every semester, with 5 marks each. Six skills have to be assessed during the semester. These are listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. Both end of semester tests and informal class tests should be prepared and marked by the teacher and administered by the school. In the middle of each semester, parents receive a descriptive report about their son's or daughter's progress without any marks or letter grades, but only teacher's comments about the student's achievements. At the end of each semester, parents will receive a full report giving information in the form of an overall letter grade without any marks. During the whole year, each pupil has to do two projects, one for each semester.

For grades 10-12, teachers write one descriptive report with teacher's comments in the middle of each semester and a full report giving information with letter grades at the end of the semester. In grades 10 and 11, the overall mark is 100, which is divided as 30 marks for continuous assessment and 70 marks for the final semester test. These end of semester tests are prepared by the Ministry, but marked and administered by schools. There are no formal class tests, but teachers can prepare 15-20 minute quizzes focusing on one of the following skills each: listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, or vocabulary. During the whole year, students are expected to do two projects individually or in small groups, one every semester.

For all grades, there are no re-sitting of exams, so students shift directly to the next level except students in grade 12, who have to attend a second session exam prepared by the English Department. Additionally, teachers should use the following techniques as continuous assessment tools: day-to-day classroom observation, quizzes and informal class tests, homework, project work, portfolios, group work, generic tasks or extensive reading, self-assessment, and feedback to students. Teachers have to keep notes as evidence of continuous assessment in order to use them when writing the descriptive reports.

Review of Chapters and Appendices

A review of the literature is provided in chapter 2. It contains a review of current research on the use of student portfolios. Also, the advantages and disadvantages of student portfolios are discussed and a general review of electronic portfolios has been highlighted. Then, the methodology of the current study is discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 focuses on the findings which were obtained from the instruments used in the study: surveys and interviews. Also, the findings are interpreted and comments are included in this chapter about the use of student portfolios in Omani schools from the following groups: teachers, supervisors, students, and parents. In the final chapter, the conclusion with the findings are summarized and recommendations for further research are provided.

There are nine appendices. Appendices A-D provide the surveys used with teachers, supervisors, parents, and students. Appendices E-H show the statistical analyses of the surveys' results for the above mentioned groups. The final appendix, Appendix I, lists the interview questions used in teacher, supervisor, and parent interviews.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

When traditional assessment fails to measure students' learning processes effectively, there is a need for new types of assessment. Among these alternative assessments, student portfolios have been one of the most popular assessment tools. Gibbs (2004) states that "traditionally, portfolios have been used as a visual arts tool showcasing an artist's accomplishments and personally favored work" (p. 27). Because artists use portfolios as a tool to collect and show their work, today portfolios used in language classes are viewed as folders that contain students' work gathered over time to show their progress in the target language. Shaaban (2001) defines student portfolios as a "record of a student's work over time and in a variety of modes to show the depth, breadth, and development of the student's abilities" (p. 7). Large folders, plastic bins, and boxes or cardboard file boxes can be used to store portfolios.

In addition, Davis (1993) defines portfolios as a "cumulative collection of students' work" (p. 247). She believes that students have the choice to decide what examples to include in their portfolios that characterize their growth and accomplishment over the school year, so teachers will have a fuller picture of students' achievements. Nelson and Nelson (2001) suggest that "any container that can hold reports, videos, photos, and samples of children's artwork can be an appropriate portfolio" (p. 19). Porter and Cleland (1995) define a portfolio as "a collection of artifacts accompanied by a reflective narrative that not only helps the learner to understand and extend learning, but invites the reader of the portfolio to gain insight about learning and the learner" (p. 154).

Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) state that "a language portfolio is a compilation of an individual child's work, showing his/her language abilities, effort, and language development over time" (p. 23). Usually, a portfolio should include samples of written work, audio or video recordings, drawings, teacher's notes, tests, peer and self-assessment forms, and reviews of books or stories read. Portfolios provide a way of individualizing the learning and assessment process because each portfolio is different. Thus, students are partially in control of their portfolios and can develop them in ways that express their individuality. Brown and Hudson (1998) emphasize

that language teachers should use portfolio assessment to encourage students to “select, compile, and display their work” (p. 664).

Portfolios are used in many different kinds of educational institutions and with students of different ages. Gottlieb (1995) states, “Portfolios offer the opportunity for students of any age, from kindergarten to adult, to showcase their accomplishments in any language and through multiple means” (p. 12). He suggests that portfolios can be classified, depending on their identifying characteristics and suggestions for their contents, into six prototype portfolio categories: Collections, Reflections, Assessment, Documentation, Linkages, and Evaluation. In this CRADLE approach, he suggests that each portfolio type can be viewed independently or as an additive step of increasing complexity.

Implementing portfolios as an alternative means of assessment effectively may result in several advantages over traditional forms of assessment for the teachers. For instance, Shaaban (2001) points out that “portfolios provide the teacher with a detailed picture of a student’s language performance in a variety of different tasks” (p. 7). Also, portfolios give teachers the opportunity to link instruction with assessment, so assessing students may take place on the activities they are involved in, and on what is going on in the classroom. Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) note that teachers can also use portfolios as a “body of work...to discuss the children’s progress with their parents, other teachers, the school authorities, and the children themselves” (p. 24). Blake (1999) states that “portfolios offer an efficient and comprehensive way to address the needs of the three main players in a child’s education: teachers, parents, and students” (p. 14).

Additionally, regular conferences with each student can help teachers to know and give genuine attention to all learners, and create a strong relationship with students. Georgiou and Pavlou (2003) suggest that parents should also be involved actively in the portfolio process through letters, meetings, filling forms of comments, or through parent-teacher-learner conferences. Of course, this kind of involvement makes parents feel that they are part of their child’s learning development and gives them some insight into what is going on behind the walls of the classroom.

Todd (2002) describes portfolios as “the most obvious and widely-used learning instrument that could be used as input for self-assessment” (p. 18). He

suggests that if portfolios are evidence to learners of their own effort, progress, and achievements, they are suitable for self-assessment. Thus, portfolios can be used as evaluation tools not only for teachers, but also for self-evaluation. Dougan (1996) states, “The portfolio thus can serve multiple purposes: self-evaluation by the students and student evaluation by the faculty” (p. 176). Also, Barootchi and Keshavarz (2002) report that “information gleaned from portfolios can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and student performance, as well as to develop instructional goals and objectives based on documentation provided by the student in the portfolio” (p. 280).

Kemp and Toperoff (1998) point out that English teachers must recognize that using portfolios as an effective means of assessment for their students should be implemented through some specific stages. First, teachers need to identify the teaching goals to assess students’ work through portfolios. Making decisions on the teaching goals will guide the selection and assessment of student’s work for the portfolio. Second, the teacher should introduce the idea of portfolio to the class. The best way to do that is to show the students some good examples of English portfolios prepared by other classes. Third, specifying the content of the portfolio, how they will be graded, and when—both orally and in written forms—are important procedures. This is because these stages help learners to feel more secure and less-threatened.

The final stage of implementing portfolio assessment is to determine assessment scores by using a variety of tools such as rating scales and checklists for the different skills. After the portfolios are complete, student-teacher conferences, which are short individual meetings with each learner, are good opportunities to present students’ portfolios. Kemp and Toperoff (1998) suggest that “student-teacher conferences play an important role in the evaluation of student’s progress” (p. 8). If the criteria for selecting the portfolio and the grades for assessing the contents are clear to the teacher and the students at the outset of the process, the portfolio can be an excellent tool for assessing students. Dougan (1996) points out that “if the purpose, the content, and the evaluation criteria of the portfolio are determined, the portfolio will be a suitable means of assessment for students” (p. 176).

In addition, Coombe and Barlow (2004) conducted two case studies in the United Arab Emirates about reflective portfolios. The purpose of their case studies

was to provide a rationale for using one type of alternative assessment, the portfolio, as a measure of writing ability. The two case studies were implemented in Dubai Men's College (DMC) and the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU). Students were asked to write a five-entry portfolio, where the final entry was to incorporate reflection into the portfolio providing information on their perception of the overall quality of their portfolios. The two case studies showed that the inclusion of a reflective element in the portfolio strengthened students' writing and trained students to assess themselves through reflection.

Madeja, Dorn, and Sabol (2004) suggest that "it is too important to restrict the [evaluation] process to standardized tests as the only indicator of student learning or success" (p. 2). Traditional and standardized tests depend mainly on recalling and reproducing what students have learned in the language. However, they have many disadvantages that can affect the assessment process itself. Macias (1995) believes that the testing situation itself often produces anxiety, so students will not be able to think clearly. Also, students may be facing personal problems or illness during the exam period. Another disadvantage of traditional tests happens when students are unfamiliar with the language and format of the tests. Macias states that "traditional testing often masks what the student can do in the second language" (p. 8). However, Karoly and Franklin (1996) emphasize that paper and pencil tests should not be excluded and "portfolios should be used as supplements rather than substitutes for standardized tests" (p. 180).

Davis (1993) states that "if you do grade portfolios, you will need to establish clear criteria" (p. 247). Because a considerable amount of class time has been invested in portfolios, many teachers think that portfolios should be graded. Farr and Tone (1994) explain that when teachers decide to grade portfolios they must set some criteria, which grow out of instructional goals and objectives, as well as student interest and purposes. Johnson (1996) believes that portfolios are not just a collection of materials stuffed into a folder. Instead, portfolios must be "created, collected and organized in such a way to demonstrates certain competencies" (p. 11). He suggests that purposes, evidence, and assessment criteria are the three most important components to portfolio design and development. Mitton (2004) points out that teachers should understand how portfolios will be assessed. She agrees that the

“assessment process of portfolios is a very important stage because each portfolio is unique in its form and content that tells what a student has learned” (p. 23).

Bol, Ross, Nunnery, and Alberg (2002) conducted a study to investigate teachers’ assessment practices in school restructuring models. They used questionnaires and focus group interviews as survey methods. The questionnaires were distributed to teachers in 11 elementary schools in their first year of implementation and teachers in 11 elementary schools in their fourth year of implementation. Results indicated that there was more frequent use of alternative assessment strategies among fourth-year teachers when compared to first-year teachers. Also, they found that the most frequent use of alternative assessment tools among fourth-year teachers was the use of portfolio assessment.

Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan (2001) state that “the portfolio concept has become increasingly popular as a means of monitoring students’ work in first and second or foreign language classrooms” (p. 223). McNamara and Deane (1995) suggest that when portfolio assessment is used, “students [will] have a greater voice in their language learning process” (p. 21). Becker and Weiner (1995) explain that some teachers are using portfolios for assessment, but they seem to be using them as collections rather than as focused assessment tools. In fact, very few teachers involve their students in the key elements of the portfolio assessment process such as self-assessment and goal-setting.

Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991, p. 61-63) claim that portfolios can be “a window into the students’ heads” to understand the educational process at the level of individual learner for both teachers and students. Portfolios are “as varied as the children who create them and as the classrooms in which they are found.” Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer consider a portfolio as a portfolio when it provides a “comprehensive and complex” view of student performance in “context.” Then, teachers should look to students as participants in, rather than the objects of assessment. Portfolios should provide a “forum” that encourages students to be “independent self-directed learners” (p. 63).

Cook-Benjamin (2001) looks at a portfolio as “a purposeful collection of student’s work that tells a story of the student’s efforts, progress, or achievements in one or more area” (p. 6). She suggests that portfolio assessment provides benefits that

more traditional measures do not provide. For example, when portfolio assessment is used students develop better self-assessment skills and become less reliant on grades. Also, portfolios can improve the work attitudes of schoolteachers as well as students. However, she mentions some issues that should be considered. Some of these questions that should be answered before implementing a portfolio approach are the following:

1. How will the content of a portfolio be assessed?
2. Will this portfolio measure replace other assessment methods or supplement them?
3. Will the students, teachers, parents, or potential employers be allowed to read the contents?
4. Who should determine what is in the portfolio—the teachers or the student?
5. How will the portfolio be stored and who will be responsible for storing it?

Cook-Benjamin (2001) ends her article with three realizations from her experience of using portfolio assessment. First, the portfolio must reflect the class in which it is used, so there is no one right way to create a portfolio. Second, “the portfolio continuously evolves” (p. 7) and new information is gathered that must be reflected in the portfolio assessment system. Finally, portfolio assessment has great positive effects on students to feel a sense of accomplishment in the completeness of the portfolio, realizing the growth they have achieved, and the areas which need to be improved.

Campbell, Melenyzer, Nettles, and Wyman (2000) point out that “providing for student choice and interest” (p. 32) is important because allowing students to choose what to include in their portfolios can help them to have some autonomy over their learning. By giving students a choice, they will be powerfully motivated because they will feel that they have some control over what they are learning.

Using portfolios in assessing students has become very popular among English teachers from primary to secondary levels because they motivate students to revise written work through teacher and peer feedback. Nilson (1998) states that “portfolios encourage constructive dialogue between students and instructors and motivate

students to attempt more varied and adventuresome writing, to take instructor and peer feedback seriously, and to revise their work, often several times” (p. 180).

When the quality of tests can not tell exactly what and how students can do with language, there is a need to use other alternative tools of assessment such as student portfolios. Lorna (2003) states that “portfolio assessments are meant to reflect more closely what is expected of students in the real world” (p. 8). Stoyhoff (1999) suggests that portfolios provide direct evidence of what students can do with the language and offer a record of their development over the year. He points out that the development process of a portfolio increases students’ self-confidence in the language.

Lambert and McCombs (1998, p. 327) point out that “portfolio assessment” has been used as a major form of alternative assessment to make many “instruction-related decisions” related to the teaching-learning process, student motivation, self-assessment, personal growth monitoring, and curriculum revisions. They suggest that the most positive aspect of “portfolio assessment” is its focus on self-assessment for the students. Through student portfolios, teachers can learn a lot about their students and students can learn a great deal about themselves and reflect on how and what they learn. Duffy, Jones, and Thomas (1999) suggest that through portfolio assessment “teachers increase their own awareness of how students learn while students become thoughtful evaluators of their own work” (p. 34).

Hanson and Gilkerson (1999) describe four characteristics of portfolio assessment. The portfolio must be clearly linked with instructional objectives, be an ongoing assessment system, avoid becoming a teacher manufactured document, and be performance based. Estrem (2004) states that “portfolios are increasingly seen as a way to evaluate students’ work more authentically and effectively” (p. 125). According to Nichols (1995), “portfolios also provide deeper insight into students’ progress, revealing not only the final outcomes, ... but also the means by which students have arrived at those outcomes” (p. 80). On the other hand, Nichols points out that the revision and evaluation of student portfolios can prove time-consuming. This is because each set of materials in the portfolios is unique and individual student conferences generally are involved. Also, he explains that student portfolios can present storage problems over time and it may be expensive to sustain portfolios

assessment if schools do not supply students with the needed materials and copies used in the portfolios.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003, p. 53) supports the use of portfolios and suggests the following considerations when deciding to use portfolios:

1. What are the goals of the portfolios? What do you want your students to learn by the act of creating portfolios? What processes or outcomes are to be evaluated by the portfolios?
2. How will students choose what to include in the portfolios?
3. How and when will work be included in the portfolios?
4. How will student and faculty reflection occur in the portfolio process?
5. How will the portfolio be reviewed and evaluated? What would a successful portfolio in your program look like? What are your criteria for deciding if a portfolio is a “success”?
6. Will the portfolio be graded? If so, how?
7. How and where will portfolios be stored?
8. Will the portfolios be passed from one faculty member to another? Will students retain ownership of portfolios?
9. What are the benefits of moving toward portfolio assessment? What are the areas of concern?
10. Is the collection of student work a feasible practice in your program?

According to Magwood (2003), most curriculums are test driven, which result in more teacher-directed learning rather than a student-centered approach. For this reason, students need to have enrichment opportunities that can provide higher order thinking skills. Magwood recommends that standardized test scores should not be the only criteria to determine a school’s success. Also, in order to provide a more complete portrait of student performance, authentic assessment such as curriculum-based and portfolio assessment should be used along with standardized tests. In addition, it is the responsibility of schools to develop assessment methods that are more responsive to the learning and assessment styles of student populations. Magwood states that “portfolios can bridge the gap that often occurs between assessment and instruction” (p. 334). This is because portfolios are authentic means

for representing students' work across subject areas. Also, she states that "[by] using portfolios, students have samples of their work to take to the next grade, teachers have work to share with parents during conferences, and most important, portfolios are used to reflect the quality of teachers' instruction" (p. 334).

Valdez (2001) finds by using a monthly portfolio project for seventh grade students that this project helps them to track their progress, analyze and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, and improve their performance. She outlines what needs to be included in student portfolio entries. Grades are assigned simply and quickly by using a published final portfolio evaluation scoring guide. She assigns each entry a possible 50 points that is equivalent to a test grade. She states that "creating a portfolio is an active learning strategy" (p. 43). It is true that portfolios are a lot of work, but they can improve both students' learning and teaching practices if they are used in a meaningful and worthwhile way.

Koskinen (1994) reports that 32 teachers from different schools in Bellevue, Washington participated in a three-year project of literacy learning and assessment. The first year of the project was devoted to exploring the new learning outcomes and issues of assessment. The next two years were used to implement portfolio assessment gradually. Portfolios helped teachers to communicate effectively with parents and to support report card grades and progress reports. The following four aspects of the project helped teachers to use portfolios effectively: involving teachers in the development of the portfolio framework, conducting monthly group meetings, using portfolios to describe children, and evaluating portfolios. The main results of this project were the following: 100% of the teachers in the program wanted to continue, 15 schools applied to implement portfolios with school teams, and 88% of the students wanted to keep portfolios again the next year. Koskinen states that this project "changed portfolio from a noun, a place to store work, to a verb, a process of looking closely at students' work to help us learn about ourselves and our students" (p. 668).

Electronic Portfolios

The benefits of portfolio have been expanded with the development of electronic portfolios. Hewett (2004) states that "an electronic portfolio simply means

that the portfolio is technology based” (p. 27). Electronic portfolios give students ownership and responsibility for their own learning. Hudson (2004) points out that if schools have computers which have new “software, web services or internet connection” (p. 21), electronic portfolios should be developed. She explains that teachers as well as students need “training” as an integral part of the process and product of creating portfolios, and to benefit from these technological resources. Ali (2006) reports that “the electronic portfolio is a result of technology being readily and conveniently used in most classrooms today. They are highly motivating for the students who are encouraged by the exhibition of their work” (p. 125).

Chang, Wu, and Ku (2005) conducted the first study to incorporate electronic teaching and learning portfolios into EFL learning within the island community of Taiwan. The participants of the study were 37 eighth-grade Taiwanese students from one class at a public junior high school. An English teacher collaborated with a computer teacher to help students use Microsoft Front Page to develop web pages that contained electronic portfolios throughout the semester and then to publish their personal websites on the World Wide Web at the end of the semester. Chang, Wu, and Ku found that the use of electronic portfolios to teach and assess EFL positively affected both teachers and students who were accustomed to traditional methods of teaching and learning English. The researchers suggested the following recommendations for teachers who are interested in building electronic portfolios within their subject areas: identify learning content and objectives, create a syllabus, arrange teaching portfolio content, seek cooperative researchers, learn more about computer technology, provide student support, follow the schedule closely, and finally back up documents periodically.

Electronic portfolios have an advantage over hard copy portfolios. Hewett (2004) points out that these kinds of portfolios can be easily assessable and they have the capability to store multiple media. Also, they are easy to upgrade and allow cross-referencing of student work. Similarly, Janesick (2001) states that “electronic portfolios allow for easier storage and retrieval of information, and also allow for easier inclusion of parental input and feedback” (p. 14). Lankes (1995) points out that electronic portfolios can store information in the form of “text, graphics, sound, and video” (p. 4).

Advantages of Portfolio Assessment

According to Shaaban (2001), portfolios are not useful for teachers only, but they provide learners with many advantages too. For example, portfolios give learners the chance to become responsible for their own learning by becoming actively involved in areas such as goal-setting. Also, portfolios can help students identify their strengths and weaknesses in the target language. Furthermore, using portfolios as an assessment tool creates an atmosphere of motivation and excitement for learning. This is because learners observe progress as it takes place, and they have access to the products of their efforts to be proud of in front of friends and family.

Koskinen (1994) reports that student portfolios can “enhance both teaching and learning” (p. 666). Through self-reflection and self-evaluation teachers can evaluate their instructions critically and use portfolio information to make instructional decisions. Also, students will be more interested in and responsible for their own learning. Freeman and Freeman (1992) suggest that portfolios can show parents, teachers, and advisors that students are learning, what kinds of activities are valued inside the class, and what types of activities they can do outside the school to support learning. Also, they state that the use of student portfolios can “lead teachers to adopt new ways of teaching” (p. 39).

Brown and Hudson (1998, p. 664) report three advantages for portfolio assessment. They put these advantages into three categories:

1. Strengthening student’s learning by focusing learners’ attention on learning processes, facilitating practice and revision processes, motivating students, if well planned, and fostering student-teacher and student-student collaboration.
2. Enhancing the teacher’s role by providing teachers with a clearer picture of students’ language growth, and providing insights into the progress of each individual student.
3. Improving testing processes by enhancing student and teacher involvement in assessment, providing opportunities for teachers to observe students using meaningful language to accomplish various authentic tasks in a variety of situations, increasing the variety of information collected on

students, and making teachers' ways of assessing students' work more systematic.

In addition, Macias (1995, p. 8) suggests the following five advantages when using alternative assessment such as portfolio assessment:

1. It does not intrude on regular classroom activities.
2. It reflects the curriculum that is actually being implemented in the classroom.
3. It provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student.
4. It provides multiple indices that can be used to gauge student progress.
5. It is more multiculturally sensitive and free of norm, linguistic, and cultural biases found in traditional testing.

MacLeod (2005) summarizes the benefits of portfolios as the following: "They match assessment with what students actually do, they develop student awareness of their progress and build organizational skills, they motivate continuous work, and they provide an overview of student work teachers can look at over time" (p. 147).

Disadvantages of Portfolio Assessment

It is true that the strengths of portfolios are very clear from the beginning, but the weaknesses of portfolio assessment may not be very obvious from the first. Thus, planning carefully before implementing portfolios could help teachers and school administrations to avoid a lot of problems. Brown and Hudson (1998, p. 665) address five disadvantages of using portfolio assessment:

1. Design decision issues include who will determine grading criteria, how grading criteria will be established, who will determine what the portfolio will contain, and how much of daily authentic classroom activities will be included in the portfolios.
2. Logistical issues involve finding the increased time and resources needed to support portfolios assessments, ways to rely on the training and abilities of teachers to implement portfolio assessments, and the time for teachers to read and rate portfolios on a regular basis throughout the school year.

3. Interpretation issues include grading students' achievements as represented in their portfolios, setting standards and interpreting the portfolios in a way that is equally fair to all students, training teachers to make fair interpretations, and reporting portfolio assessment results so that all interested audiences can understand them.
4. Reliability issues involve ensuring sufficient reliability across rates and occasions when rating occurs, encouraging objectivity, preventing mechanical errors, standardizing the rating and grading processes, and ensuring equal access to resources for all students.
5. Validity issues include demonstrating the validity of the portfolios for the purposes of making decisions about students, determining how adequately the portfolios exemplify students' work, development, and abilities, identifying and controlling any potential intervening variables that might affect students' achievements, and separating out which student abilities lead to which performance characteristics in what amounts.

Additionally, MacLeod (2005) states that the two most important weaknesses of portfolio assessment are “the difficulties of avoiding mark inflation and the amount of marking required if a broad selection of student work is gathered” (p. 147).

Roosken (2001) points out that portfolios have been promoted by many educators as one of the best alternative assessment tools that can replace or supplement traditional testing. Portfolio assessment provides a more authentic means of assessing a learner's ability. She states that “portfolios can be immensely useful to teachers, parents, and the children themselves” (p. 24).

When students feel that tests do not represent what they know and can do with the language, then portfolios may be a fairer way to show the different skills, knowledge, and ideas they have acquired. Dudley (2001) believes that a “portfolio is a powerful assessment instrument in [a] school” (p. 20). Teachers who decide to implement portfolio assessment should be patient with their students, because learners need some time before they can use portfolios effectively. Also, they should recognize that portfolios are not merely collections of random pieces of work. Rather, the important thing to keep in mind is to set goals and to include samples of work that provide evidence of the students' progress towards those goals.

A review of the literature shows that portfolios are one of the most popular and best alternative assessment tools these days because they provide an excellent vehicle for students to showcase their progress and their best work to date. Also, much research offers insight into the invaluable strengths of portfolios for teachers, school administrations, parents, and students themselves as self-reflectors. Much research recommends essential planning before implementing this type of assessment in order to get it right. However, little research considers why so many teachers do not implement portfolio assessment correctly and systematically as a supplemental tool to be used with traditional tests. In addition, there have not been any studies that relate to the use of student portfolios specifically in Omani schools. I believe my research helps us understand the position of Omani English teachers about using student portfolios in the assessment process. This research study adds to the literature by addressing the question of why Omani teachers do not use student portfolios during the assessment periods at the end of each semester.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study focuses on the use of student portfolios in the assessment process in Omani schools. It seeks to answer the following overall question: Why are Omani teachers not using student portfolios as an additional means of assessment beside traditional testing to evaluate students' growth and progress? It also addresses the following sub-questions: (1) What are students' attitudes toward using portfolios as a second means of assessment? (2) Do English supervisors support teachers to use student portfolios effectively? (3) Do parents look positively upon student portfolios as a supportive tool of assessment?

Data were collected from multiple sources using a combination of quantitative data from four surveys and qualitative data from interviews, as well as my personal impression from my work as a senior teacher in one of the Omani schools. First, the four surveys were distributed to the following groups: 44 teachers, 15 supervisors, 22 parents, and 58 students. The participants in each group were asked to read each statement on the survey carefully and respond as honestly as they could by ticking the box that best represented them. The scale used in each survey was a four response option using the response options "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree." Then, they were also asked to answer open-ended questions briefly at the end of each survey (see Appendices A, B, C, and D).

Second, interviews were arranged with participants who indicated at the end of the questionnaires that they would agree to be interviewed from the following groups: teachers, supervisors, and parents. During the interviews, the participants were asked semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix I) related to the use of student portfolios in the assessment process.

The Participants

The participants in this study were four main different groups. The first group consisted of 44 English teachers, 20 males and 24 females, who had various years of experience in teaching English in Omani schools. The second group consisted of 15

English supervisors, eight males and seven females, who had more than three years of experience as teachers and more than one year of experience as supervisors. The third group consisted of 22 parents, all of them males who had children studying in Omani schools. Some of these parents were highly educated while others had low levels of education. The fourth group consisted of 58 Omani male students from grade eight and nine. These respondents ranged in age from 14-16 years old.

Development of the Instruments

Study Surveys

Four surveys were used as the main data collection tools in this study. These surveys were a teacher survey, a supervisor survey, a parent survey, and a student survey (see Appendices A, B, C, and D). The teacher survey consisted of 44 statements and two open-ended questions. During the survey, the 44 participants were asked to provide the following background information: gender, age, levels teaching now, years of experience as a teachers, and marital status. The supervisor survey included 14 statements and three open-ended questions. This survey solicited the following background information: gender, age, martial status, years of experience as a supervisor and as a teacher, and levels supervising now.

Because of their low level of English, the last two surveys, the parent and student surveys, were translated into the Arabic language in order for them to answer the survey statements effectively. The parent survey had 10 statements and one open-ended question, and it asked the participants to give information about gender, age, and level of learning. The student survey also contained 10 statements with two open-ended questions, and it asked students to write their age, gender, and grade.

The ideas found in some books (e.g., Fear & Tone, 1994) and in some articles (e.g., Blake, 1999; Cook-Benjamin, 2001; Coombe & Barlow, 2004; Hudson, 2004; and Magwood, 2003) about student portfolios provided me with effective guidelines in order to develop good surveys. Additionally, the valuable advice I received from school colleagues and from other MA TESOL students at the American University of Sharjah were of great support that resulted in well developed questionnaires. After finishing the four surveys of my study, a copy was sent to my thesis supervisor to

review. His suggestions and comments were of great help. Then, two professors of my thesis committee participated by suggesting additional improvements.

After the review process, the teacher survey, the supervisor survey, and the parent survey were then piloted by selecting specific participants who were not involved in the final surveys. For example, an experienced teacher with more than 25 years of teaching was asked to do the teacher survey. Also, the supervisor survey was piloted by a supervisor who was also a student in the MA TESOL program and who had more than six years of experience in teaching. The parent survey was piloted by a headmaster who worked in one of the Omani schools and at the same time had three children studying in different grades. The pilot process helped to identify some problems that needed to be adjusted in these surveys. During this stage, the form of the surveys, the order of statements, and the space provided for answering the open-ended questions were some of the areas that were improved. Also, the pilot process was of great help in eliminating some repeated or unclear statements. After considering the surveys ready for use in this study, I administered them myself.

Interviews

The second method I used to collect data was interviews. After analyzing the data from surveys with teachers, supervisors, parents, and students, I interviewed two to three participants from each group, who agreed to be interviewed. I interviewed three teachers, two supervisors, and two of the parents. The interviews with teachers and supervisors were in English, but the interviews with parents were in Arabic, this is due to their low levels of English proficiency. For this reason, I translated the parents' answers to the interviews' questions into English. Also, I used the quality of the answers to the open-ended questions in the surveys as a standard to select which participants should be interviewed.

Because most of the interviewees lived in different cities far away, I interviewed them by phone, and each interview lasted nearly 10 minutes. For this reason, I did not have the chance to record the interviews, but I wrote down most of what was said as responses to the interview questions. I asked every interviewee five questions that helped me to understand their attitudes towards the use of student portfolios in the assessment process. Also, the interview questions were selected to

understand more clearly the interviewees' responses to the survey statements and their suggestions regarding the use of portfolios in the classroom. (See Appendix I for the interview questions in more details.) Thus, the interview process was completed in three different phases:

Phase One

In phase one, three English teachers were interviewed, two males and one female. The interview helped me to know more clearly and directly whether these teachers believed in the importance of student portfolios in the assessment process. Also, these interviews helped me to discover if these teachers used student portfolios regularly or not in class. Through these interviews I was able to find out in detail the problems that might prevent teachers from using student portfolios in schools, if the parents cooperated or not, and finally whether the supervisors guided and encouraged teachers to use this supportive assessment tool.

Phase Two

In the second phase, two English supervisors were interviewed. The semi-structured interviews provided questions that addressed the advantages of the use of student portfolios for both teachers and students (see Appendix I). Also, the participants were asked what they thought about the reasons that stop teachers from using student portfolios besides traditional testing. Interviewing these supervisors helped me to understand how they provide teachers with guidelines regarding the right way of using student portfolios in assessing students. Through these interviews I was able to know the recommendations and advice that supervisors gave to teachers in order to be aware of the importance of using student portfolios in class.

Phase Three

This final phase involved two Omani parents who agreed to be interviewed. They both had two children each studying in grades five and six. This interview allowed me to develop more insight into parents' opinions and viewpoints about the use of student portfolios in the assessment process. Through these interviews the participants expressed their attitudes regarding the use of student portfolios clearly, and they provided me with more detailed reasoning of why their children were not

interested in having personal portfolios. Also, I was able to better understand their expectations about how teachers could use student portfolios more effectively in addition to test results in schools in order to give more comprehensive and holistic views of students' achievements.

Data Analysis

The information collected from multiple sources using a combination of quantitative data from the four surveys and qualitative data from the interviews, as well as my personal impression from my work as a senior teachers in one of the Omani schools, are analyzed and the results are described using pie and bar charts in the following chapter. Additionally, data obtained from the interviews with teachers, supervisors, and parents are used to support the major findings of the results of the four surveys.

Appendices E-H show the complete results of the four surveys completed by teachers, supervisors, parents, and students. The averages of the responses of each group were calculated for each survey statement using the following scale: Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, and Strongly Disagree=1. My rationale for using four response categories instead of five or more was to ensure that the participants did not have the chance to choose the neutral option.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

After collecting data through surveys and interviews with teachers, supervisors, parents, and students, the important findings were analyzed and described using pie and bar charts, as well as tables. Also, data obtained from the interviews with teachers, supervisors, and parents were included and used to support the major findings of the results of the four surveys. In this chapter, the major findings of the group surveys were divided into four sections. They are outlined and discussed in the following order: “Teacher Survey and Interviews,” “Supervisor Survey and Interviews,” “Parent Survey and Interviews,” and finally “Student Survey.”

Teacher Survey and Interviews

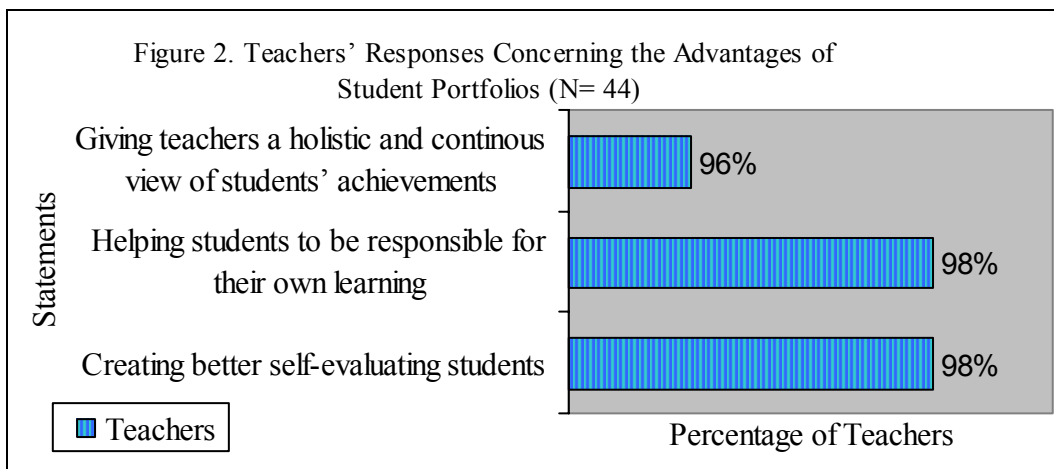
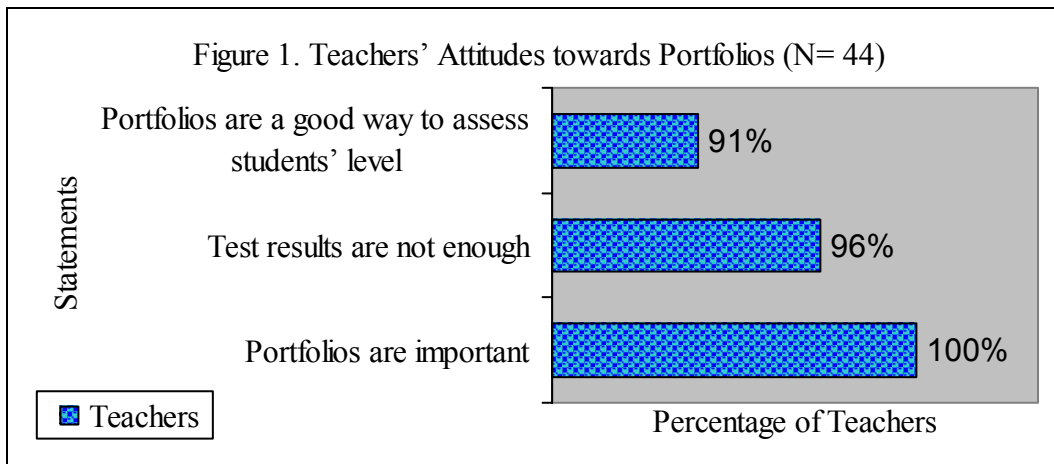
The teacher survey consisted of 44 English teachers, 20 males and 24 females, who had 5 to 10 years of experience in teaching English in Omani schools. The participating teachers answered 44 statements and two open-ended questions. Then, I interviewed three teachers who agreed to be interviewed. These interviews were held in English, and I spent about 10 minutes in each interview, where I asked five questions. The data collected from the interviews supported the results found from the survey and helped me to understand more clearly teachers’ attitudes towards the use of student portfolios in the assessment process.

Generally, the results of teachers’ responses to the survey statements indicate most of the participants agreed that test results and teachers’ comments are not enough to give a complete view of students’ progress and achievements. Although most teachers do not use portfolios regularly in class, all of them agreed that student portfolios are a necessary part of the educational system and one important method to assess students fairly. In fact, the participating teachers in the survey and interviews seemed to believe in the power of the portfolio and its many advantages as a continuous assessment technique that gives a holistic view of students’ development. Also, they responded that the process of assessing portfolios should involve not only teachers and students, but also parents, so parents should be informed about how their children are going to be assessed through portfolios.

In addition, this survey's results showed that most teachers agreed that portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment to support traditional tests. However, the majority of the participants agreed that teachers need support and special training courses in order to assess students correctly through portfolios. Although most of them responded that student portfolios are a load which is added to other school work, they felt portfolios are necessary. Most of them believed that using student portfolios in class is not a waste of time and effort, and the shortage of time should not stop teachers from using portfolios.

Not receiving encouragement and support from the Ministry of Education, supervisors, and school administrations is one of the main reasons that prevent teachers from assessing students through portfolios. Also, because parents do not know a lot about portfolios and because supervisors do not value teachers' use of portfolios, teachers ignore the effective use of portfolios in the assessment process although they have been asked to do so. However, nearly all of the participants agreed that if they had the needed training, support, and encouragement to deal with portfolios appropriately, they would use them as an additional means of assessment besides traditional testing. (Refer to Appendix E for more detailed results of the teacher survey.)

First, 100% of the 44 teachers surveyed agreed that student portfolios are an important part of the educational system at schools and one of the necessary tools of assessment. Also, 43 teachers out of 44 (98%) were convinced that assessing students' progress and achievements these days requires more than test results. 91% of the teachers reported that portfolios can be a good way to assess students' proficiency levels, but only 73% agreed with the statement, "Portfolios can assess students better than traditional testing." Results show that most of the participants seemed to realize the many advantages of using portfolios in class such as creating better self-evaluating students (98%), helping students to be responsible for their own learning (98%), and giving teachers a holistic view of students' achievement continuously (96%). Figures 1 and 2 summarize these findings.



For instance, one of the teachers responded to the open-ended question “Have you ever assessed your students by using their portfolios? Why or why not?” by writing, “Yes, it is very important for teachers to use portfolios in the assessment process as it could be the mirror for the teacher to evaluate students’ levels.” A second teacher wrote, “Yes, I have. I do not believe in testing results because they do not give always the accurate results and because some students cheat, so they will get the highest grade. By portfolios, I can assess my students more fairly and give them what they deserve.” Also, in an interview, one teacher was asked, “What are your attitudes towards the use of student portfolios in the assessment process?” He replied, “Although I rarely assess my students through portfolios, I consider them one of the effective assessment tools that can tell the level of students fairly and continuously.”

Table 1 shows the responses of teachers to the statement, “Student portfolios should involve teachers, students, and parents during the assessment process.” This might mean that teachers want to involve parents as well as students in the assessment

process through portfolios. It might mean that teachers believed that parents have the right to know more about assessing students through portfolios in order to support test results. Also, this might mean that teachers want parents to help their children to care more about having personal portfolios and to look at portfolios seriously.

Item	Survey Statement	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
11	Student portfolios should involve teachers, students, and parents during the assessment process.	38 87%	6 13%

Another important finding was that 40 teachers out of 44 (91%) reported that portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment to support test results, and 89% agreed that teachers need special training courses in how to deal with student portfolios correctly during the assessment process. For example, when I asked one of the teachers in an interview "Do you feel your supervisor is doing enough to support you with guidelines to help you in using student portfolios effectively?" he answered, "I expected my supervisor to show me some samples of portfolios, but he only told me to do so without telling me how and when. We need workshops, training courses especially for new teachers to learn how to assess our students through portfolios correctly." Although 30 teachers out of 44 (68%) said, they were not assessing students through portfolios regularly, 30 teachers (68%) also disagreed that using portfolios in class is a waste of time and effort. In addition, 37 teachers (84%) responded that shortage of time and heavy school duties should not stop teachers from using portfolios. Table 2 represents these findings.

Item	Survey Statements	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
10	Student portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment besides testing.	40 91%	4 9%
28	Teachers need support and special training courses in order to assess student correctly	39 89%	5 11%

	throughout portfolios.		
32	Most teachers do not like using student portfolios because it is a waste of time and effort.	14 32%	30 68%
41	I assess students through their portfolios regularly.	14 32%	30 68%
43	Heavy school duties and shortage of time should not stop teachers from using student portfolios during the assessment process.	37 84%	7 16%

Furthermore, the survey results indicated that 25 teachers (57%) agreed that the Ministry of Education and school administrations do not do enough to encourage teachers to use student portfolios. In addition, 30 teachers (68%) blamed supervisors for not valuing their use of portfolios in the assessment process. One teacher I interviewed said, “The Ministry of Education and supervisors should do more than this to encourage teachers not only to use portfolios, but to help them how to use them in the assessment process.” Another interesting finding is that 39 teachers (89%) agreed with the statement “Parents are not convinced that their children should be assessed through portfolios.” Also, 98% of the teachers reported that if they had the needed training, support, and encouragement, they would use student portfolios as an additional means of assessment besides traditional testing. Figures 3 and 4 summarize these results.

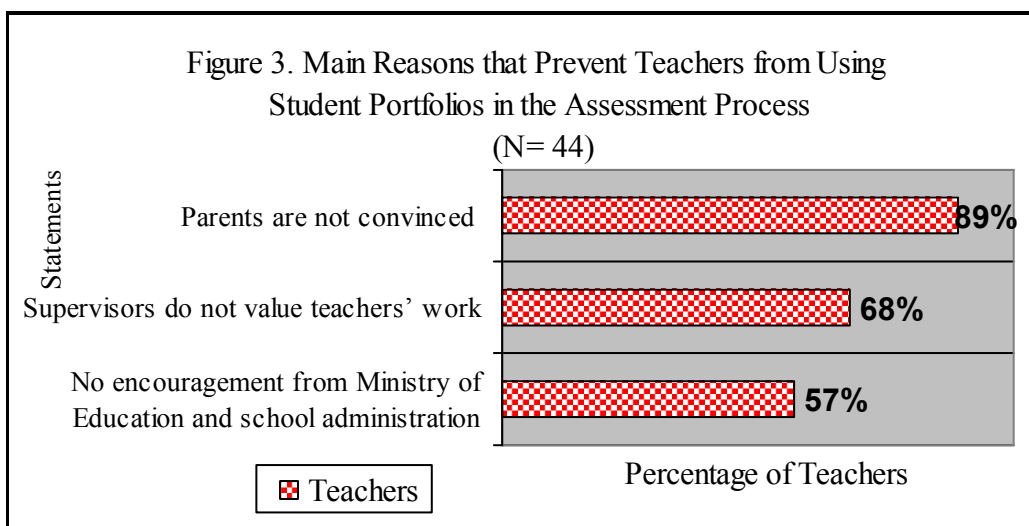
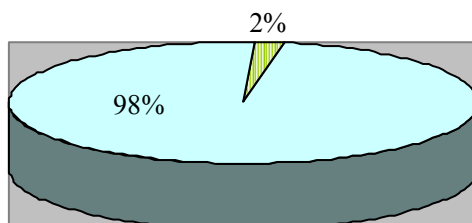


Figure 4. Teachers' Response to "If I had the needed training, support, and encouragement to deal with student portfolios appropriately, I would use them as additional means of assessment besides traditional testing." (N=44)



□ Strongly Agree & Agree

■ Strongly Disagree & Disagree

For example, one of the teachers responded to the open-ended question "What are the problems you face, as a teacher, that can prevent you from the usage of student portfolios as a part of the assessment process?" by writing, "I always see uncompleted portfolios and parents only care about test results." A second teacher wrote, "I think the main reason is the negative attitudes of both students and their parents and no encouragement from the school itself." A third one wrote, "What stopped me from using portfolios are: the big number of students in class, shortage of time, teaching more than six periods a day, the long curriculum, and having other school duties."

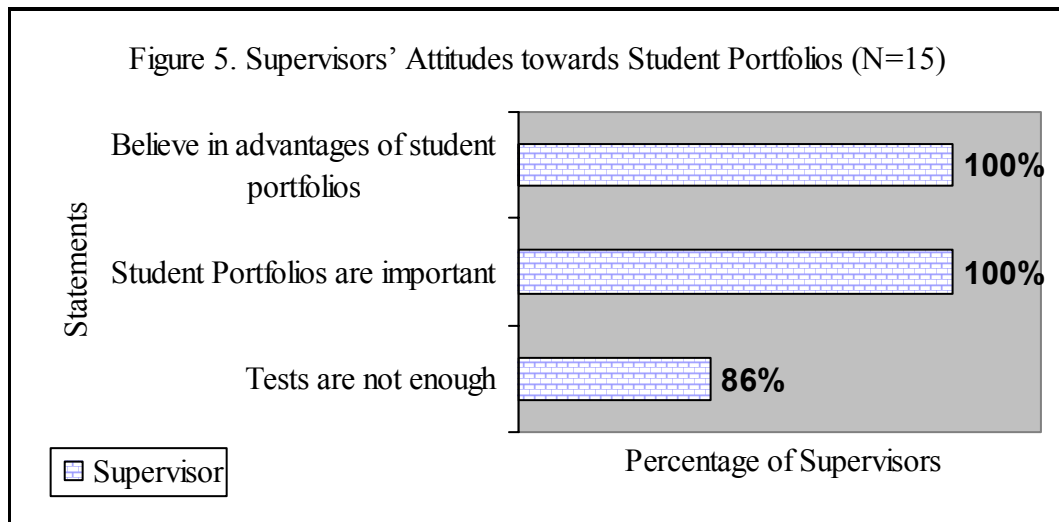
To sum up, the results of the survey and the responses of the interviews indicated that most of the teachers agreed that test results are not enough and portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment to support traditional tests. Although most teachers do not use portfolios regularly in class, they seemed to believe in the power of portfolios and their many advantages as a necessary part of the educational system. Also, because parents do not know a lot about portfolios, teachers suggested that they should be informed about how their children are going to be assessed through portfolios. In fact, teachers seem to be ignoring the effective use of portfolios in the assessment process because of heavy school duties and because they do not feel any encouragement or support from the Ministry of Education, supervisors, and school administrations. For this reason, teachers need encouragement, support, and special training courses in order to use portfolios in the assessment process in the classroom.

Supervisor Survey and Interviews

This group consisted of 15 English supervisors, eight males and seven females, who had more than three years of experience as teachers and more than one year of experience as supervisors. The supervisor survey was written in English and included 14 statements and three open-ended questions. After the survey, I interviewed two supervisors who agreed to be interviewed. These interviews were held in English, and I asked them five questions based on the results of the survey.

All of the 15 supervisors surveyed believed that student portfolios are a necessary part of the assessment process in the educational system in Omani schools. Most of them also agreed that a single grade is not enough to represent the achievements of students in class. Because they were fully aware of the many advantages that student portfolios can have for students, parents, and teachers themselves, these supervisors were convinced that portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment to support test results. Also, most of them agreed that teachers do not care about student portfolios, and all of them said that teachers need support and training courses to encourage students to develop good portfolios. However, heavy school duties is one of the reasons that prevent teachers from using student portfolios in the assessment process effectively. (See Appendix F for more detailed results of the supervisor survey.)

First, 86% of the participants agreed that a single grade to represent a student's level is not enough, and 100% were convinced that portfolios are an important part of the assessment process in schools. Also, all 15 supervisors surveyed believed in the many advantages of student portfolios as vehicles of continuous improvement, giving holistic assessment, developing students' self-assessment skills, and strengthening the relationship between teachers, parents, and students. Figure 5 summarizes these findings.



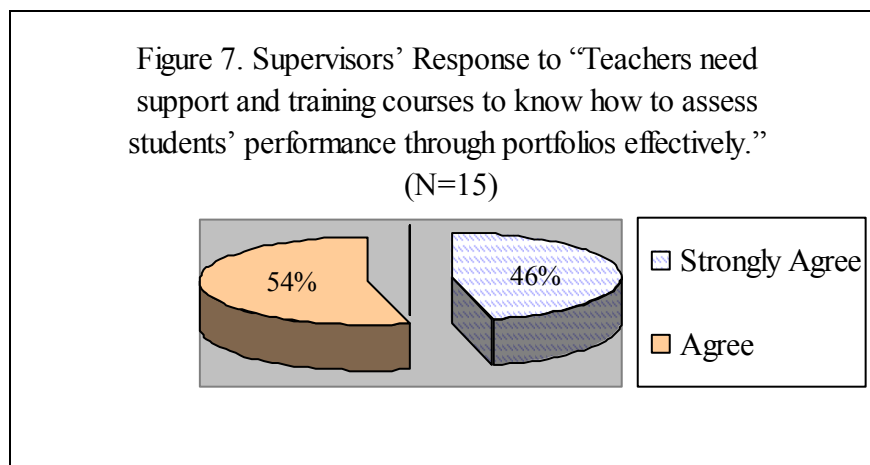
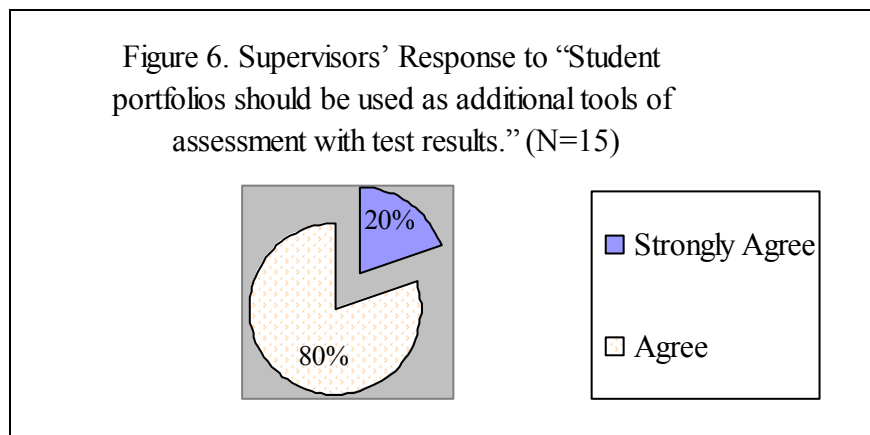
While visiting schools, 86% of the supervisors responded that they always check to see if teachers are using student portfolios during the assessment process. However, 14 of the participants (93%) agreed that teachers should not be rushed by supervisors in using student portfolios in the assessment process until they understand how they can do it effectively. Table 3 displays these findings.

Table 3. Supervisors' Responses to Statements 5 and 7 (N= 15)

Item	Survey Statements	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
5	Supervisors should not rush teachers to use portfolio assessment until teachers understand how they can deal with portfolios appropriately.	14 93%	1 7%
7	When I visit schools, I always check if my teachers are using student portfolios during the assessment process.	13 86%	2 14%

Although 100% agreed that portfolios should be used as additional tools of assessment to support test results, 80% responded that teachers considered portfolios as simply files that students keep their work in. Also, 10 participants (66%) agreed that because of heavy school duties teachers do not have time to use portfolios in school, but all of them replied that teachers need support and training courses to know

how to assess students' performance through portfolios appropriately. Figures 6 and 7 show these results.



For example, one of the supervisors responded to the open-ended question "What are some of the reasons that prevent your teachers from using student portfolios in schools as an effective means of assessment?" by writing, "Perhaps this is due to the heavy timetable and probably because some teachers lack organization of their work." A second supervisor wrote, "The big number of students, the carelessness of some teachers, the lack of training and knowledge, and the load of work might stop teachers from using portfolios." A third one wrote, "Teachers' opinions were not taken when the use of student portfolios was suggested."

The interview questions regarding how supervisors encourage teachers to use student portfolios matched the responses of the third open-ended question, "How can you support your teachers and convince them to use student portfolios to assess students' progress and achievements in class?" For instance, one supervisor

interviewed answered, "By conducting workshops, checking portfolios regularly, and giving teachers comments, feedback and guidance." Another interviewed supervisor replied, "If schools reduced unimportant administrative work, maybe teachers will have time to use portfolios." A supervisor surveyed wrote as an answer for the third open-ended question, "By conducting workshops, reviewing literature, showing samples, and reading related journals I can make my teachers convinced of using student portfolios."

From the responses to the survey and the results of the interviews, these 15 supervisors seemed to believe that student portfolios are a necessary part of the assessment process in Omani schools and that a single grade is not enough to represent students' progress. Also, surveyed supervisors were convinced that portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment to support test results. They seemed to agree that heavy school duties is one of the main reasons that prevent teachers from using student portfolios in the assessment process effectively. However, teachers need support and training courses to encourage students to develop good portfolios.

Parent Survey and Interviews

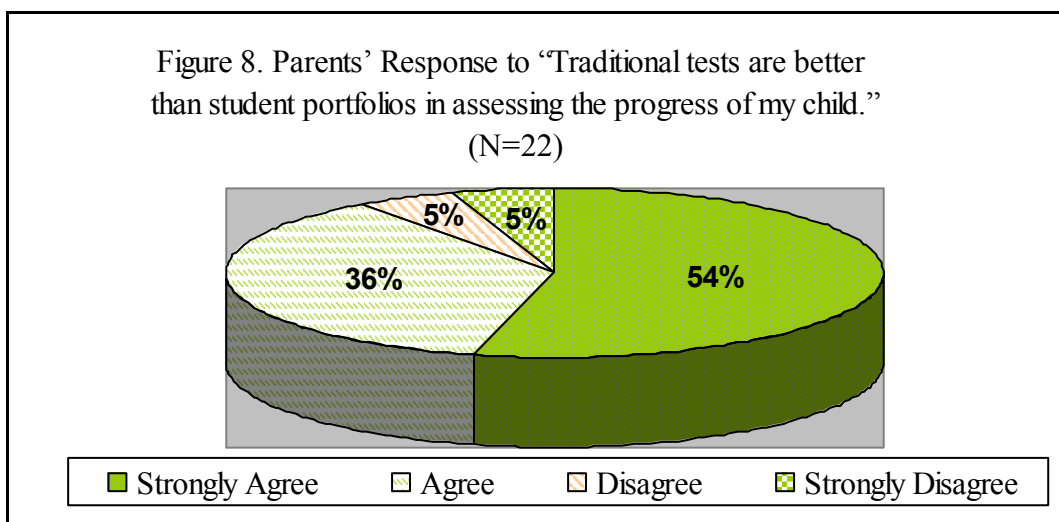
Because it was culturally difficult to find female parents who would agree to participate in this survey, 22 male parents participated who had children studying in Omani schools. Also, because some of these parents were highly educated while others had low levels of education, I translated the statements of this survey into Arabic. The parent survey had 10 statements and one open-ended question. Then, an interview process in Arabic was followed with two Omani parents who each had two children studying in grades five and six.

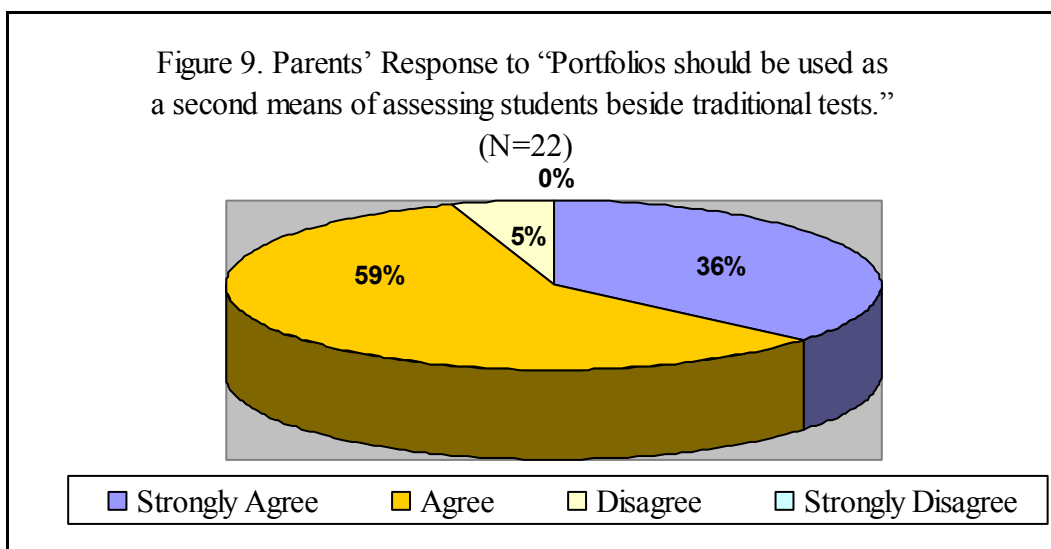
Generally, the results of the parent survey indicate that students' parents consider student portfolios good evidence of student work, but they feel portfolios should be used only as an additional means of assessment. In fact, parents wanted their children to be assessed mainly through test results, perhaps because they think that students are not interested in having personal portfolios. Also, another rather surprising finding was that some parents did not know even if portfolios were part of the assessment process in schools, and they wanted to understand how their children

would be assessed through portfolios. (Refer to Appendix G for more detailed results of the parent survey.)

First, an important finding was that 20 parents out of 22 (90%) believed that traditional tests are better than student portfolios in assessing the progress of students. Although 80% of the participating parents in this survey agreed to some extent that portfolios are good evidence of student work, 21 parents (95%) said that portfolios should not be used alone, but they should be used only as a second means of assessing students' achievements besides traditional tests. Figures 8 and 9 show parents' responses to these statements on the survey.

Adding to these findings, the responses to the open-ended prompt "Describe either a good or bad experience you have had with your child regarding his/her portfolio in school" revealed that parents seemed to agree that portfolios should not be used alone, but they should be used to support test results. For example, one parent answered the above open-ended question in the survey by writing, "Student portfolios are very effective, but they should not be used alone." Another one answered by writing, "I trust test results to tell the level of my son, but his portfolio is always a mess." A third one added, "Portfolios are effective, but they are not applied well." The above parents' responses for the open-ended question were written in Arabic and then translated into English.





Another interesting and surprising finding was that 41% of the parents did not even know whether their children had portfolios or not, and 63% did not know whether student portfolios are part of the assessment process in the schools. However, 95% of the participants thought that it is important to understand how their children will be assessed through portfolios. Table 4 below summarizes these findings.

Table 4. Parents' Responses to Statements 2, 6, and 7 (N= 22)

Item	Survey Statements	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
2	I really do not know if my child has a portfolio or not.	9 41%	13 59%
6	I do not know if my child's portfolio is part of the assessment process in the school.	14 63%	8 37%
7	I think it is important to understand how my child is assessed through portfolios.	21 95%	1 5%

In fact, interview data also strongly indicated that many parents believe their children are not interested in having personal portfolios of their own work, so they do not care to have even one. For instance, one of the parents interviewed said, "My child does not feel the value to have a personal portfolio because simply it is not used effectively." Another one replied, "My child does not care if he lost a paper in his portfolio." A third interviewed parent answered, "My son does not talk to me about his portfolio." The parents I interviewed also seemed to feel that teachers are not

doing enough to encourage students to have portfolios containing their work. They mainly blamed teachers and asked them to give students guidelines and examples of portfolio work in order to make students feel the importance of having a personal portfolio.

Based on the findings of the parent survey and interviews, parents agreed that portfolios could be good evidence of student work, but they should be used only as an additional means of assessment. Because they think that students are not interested in having personal portfolios, they wanted their children to be assessed mainly through test results. Surprisingly, some parents did not even know if portfolios were part of the assessment process in schools, so they wanted to be informed in order to understand how their children would be assessed through portfolios.

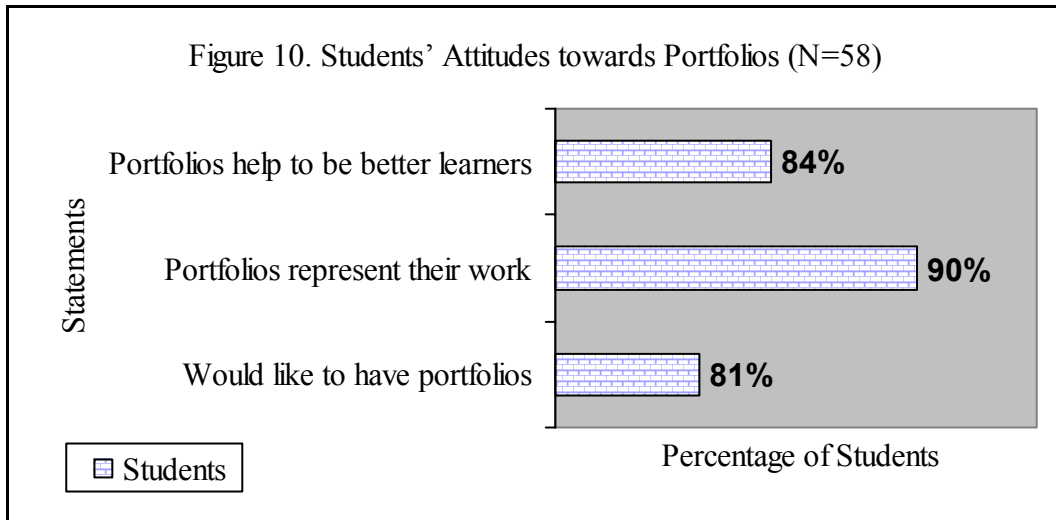
Student Survey

The student survey included 58 Omani male students from grade eight and nine, who ranged in age from 14-16 years old. This survey contained 10 statements with two open-ended questions, all in Arabic.

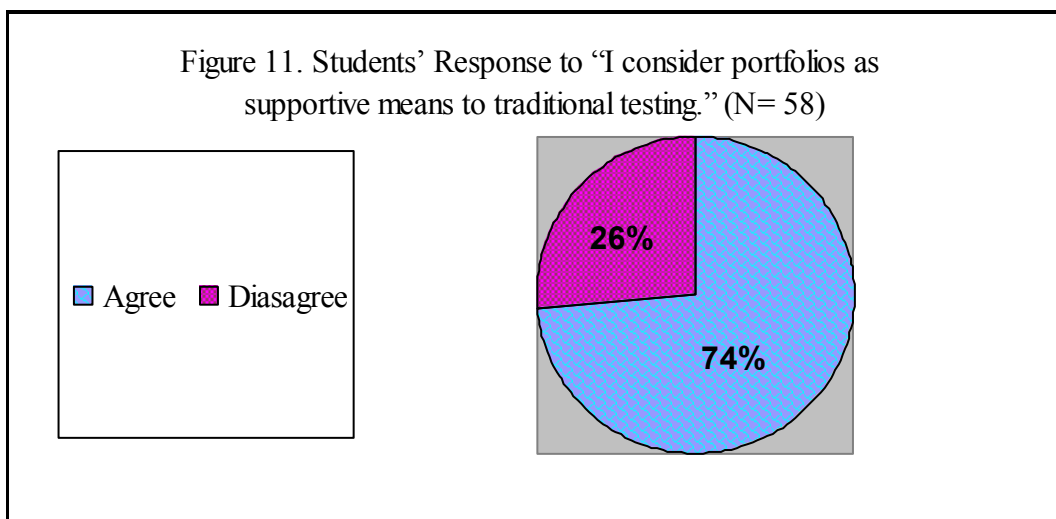
Student survey results generally revealed that students prefer to have personal portfolios that represent their work. In fact, they believe that keeping a portfolio can make them better learners. However, most of the participants of this survey agreed that portfolios should be used only as a second means of assessment along with traditional tests. Also, more than half of the participants agreed that their parents do care about their portfolios, but teachers do not encourage them to develop good portfolios and do not give them enough exercises that are related to the portfolios. (See Appendix H for the actual results of the student survey.)

An important finding was that 81% of the students agreed that it is a good idea to keep a personal portfolio containing their best work. 90% felt that portfolios represented what they had learned in school, and 49 students out of 58 (84%) said that portfolios helped them to be better learners. For example, one of the students responded to the open-ended question “What do you like best about having a personal portfolio of your good work?” by writing, “I feel more confident when I have a personal portfolio that contains my good work.” A second student replied, “Having an organized portfolio helped me to be a good student.” A third participant wrote,

“Through portfolios I can show my father what I did so far in class.” Figure 10 summarizes these findings. These students’ answers were written in Arabic and then translated into English.



In addition, the responses to the student survey showed that 74% believed that portfolios should be used as supportive tools of assessment along with school tests. For example, one student replied to the open-ended question by writing, “I want to be tested, but also I want to have a personal portfolio.” Another wrote, “Portfolios should not be used alone.” These findings are shown in Figure 11.



Additionally, it was surprising to find out that 46 students out of 58 (79%) agreed that their parents do care about their portfolios, but 81% of the students said that teachers did not encourage them to develop personal portfolios, and 38 students (66%) agreed that teachers do not give enough exercises to put in their portfolios. These findings are summarized in Table 5.

Item	Survey Statements	Agree & Strongly Agree	Disagree & Strongly Disagree
1	My teacher does not give me a lot of exercises related to my portfolio.	38 66%	20 34%
2	My teacher does not encourage me to develop a good portfolio.	47 81%	11 19%
3	My parents do not care about my portfolios.	12 21%	46 79%

In fact, students' answers to the open-ended questions supported their responses to the statements. For instance, one student answered the second open-ended question in the survey "Is there anything you do not like about having a personal portfolio of your good work?" by writing, "What my teacher is giving me to be put in my portfolio is not enough." Another student wrote, "I miss the encouragement from my teacher."

To conclude, the surveyed students preferred to have personal portfolios that represent their work because they believe that keeping a portfolio can make them better learners. However, they agreed that portfolios should be used only as a second means of assessment along with traditional tests. Also, it was surprising to find out that most of the participants agreed that parents do care about student portfolios, but teachers do not encourage students to develop good portfolios, and do not give them enough exercises that are related to the portfolios.

The following chapter summarizes the major findings of this study, discusses the limitations and suggestions for further research, and considers implications of the study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

This chapter discusses conclusions about the four categories, which are teachers, supervisors, students, and parents, regarding the use of student portfolios in the assessment process in Omani schools. First, an objective summary of the study's findings is provided. Then, limitations of this study are discussed and directions for further research are suggested. Finally, implications for teachers, supervisors, parents, and students based on these results are pointed out.

The main purpose of this study was to determine why Omani teachers do not make greater use of student portfolios as an additional means of assessment in addition to traditional testing to evaluate students' growth and progress. Results from the teacher survey showed that most of the teachers were convinced of the many advantages that portfolios can bring to the classrooms, not only for students, but also for the teachers themselves. Data gathered from interviews also strongly suggested teachers' belief in the power of portfolios in giving a holistic and continuous assessment of students' work. Overall, teachers seemed to look positively upon use of portfolios as a secondary means of assessment in schools in order to evaluate students fairly and adequately.

It is true that heavy school duties, other administrative school work, the big number of students in each class, and the lack of caring of some parents as well as students are some of the reasons that may hinder teachers from using portfolios, but these are not the only reasons. Especially, the results of the teacher survey and interviews indicated that not receiving any encouragement and support from school administrations and not being valued by supervisors or the Ministry of Education are other important factors that stop teachers from using portfolios. Also, from the interview responses and from my personal impression as a senior teacher, lacking knowledge and training about how to use and assess students through portfolios is another major reason that prevents teachers from using this assessment technique. For this reason, the participating teachers suggested that officials in the Ministry of Education should provide special training courses and ask supervisors to conduct

workshops and give related lectures in order to enrich teachers' knowledge and to guide them in using student portfolios appropriately along with other assessment means.

The second purpose of this study was to determine students' attitudes toward using portfolios as a second means of assessment. The results of the student survey indicated that students preferred to have personal portfolios containing their class work because they felt this may help them to be better learners. Although students believed in portfolios, most of them agreed that portfolios should be used only as a second means of assessment along with traditional tests. However, because some parents do not care and because some teachers do not encourage students to develop good portfolios, this may hinder students from starting the habit of keeping a portfolio that represents what they have learned in schools.

A third purpose of this study was to investigate whether English supervisors support teachers' use of student portfolios effectively or not. Responses showed that all the supervisors surveyed and interviewed believed in portfolios and agreed that teachers should use them as supportive means of assessment. Also, the survey results indicated that 93% of the supervisors believed that teachers should not be rushed to use portfolio assessment until teachers understand how they can deal with portfolios appropriately, but actually most supervisors do not encourage teachers to do that or value their work when they do. In fact, 13 supervisors out of 15 (86%) said that they checked to see if teachers use portfolios when they visit schools, but they rarely clarify to teachers how to assess students using this approach by conducting workshops, having short meetings, or presenting related seminars.

Moreover, determining if parents look positively upon student portfolios as a supportive tool of assessment or not was the fourth purpose of this study. The results of the parent survey revealed that the parents did look positively upon portfolios and considered the use of portfolios in schools as good evidence of student work in schools, but they also felt that portfolios should be used as a secondary means of assessment only. Thus, they mainly prefer their children to be assessed through traditional tests. For example, 20 parents out of 22 (90%) believed that traditional tests are better than student portfolios in assessing the progress of students. This may be due to their lack of care about their children's

education, or because they think that teachers are not encouraging students enough to keep and develop personal portfolios. Also, in my interviews with parents, they made it clear that they would like to be more involved and better informed in order to understand how their children will be assessed through this technique.

Limitations of This Study and Directions for Further Research

The focus of this study was on the use of student portfolios in the assessment process in Omani schools. If there had been more time, observing some teachers while using portfolios to assess students' work in class would have given useful information about the problems that may prevent teachers or students from using portfolios inside the classroom. Also, this kind of close observation could provide insights into whether teachers understand how portfolios are used correctly in the assessment process. So, instead of collecting teachers' views of student portfolios only through questionnaires and interviews that measure teachers' attitudes, a researcher could know teachers' actual practice in a real situation by observing the use of portfolios in the classroom. Some well designed observation checklists based on the findings of this thesis could be used as a major tool in gathering data on student portfolios.

In addition, a follow-up study could build on what this study has to offer. For instance, because teachers are asked to use student portfolios from grade 5 to 12, a future study could investigate and distinguish students' attitudes by involving more than two grades in the surveys. Involving students from two grades only, grade 8 and 9, as participants in the study might be a factor that limited insights into students' attitudes towards portfolios. Also, a researcher may decide to investigate how some teachers might understand and look at portfolios as one of the factors that can hinder students' usage of portfolios.

There are other limitations to this study that should be considered. First, because this was the first time the surveys were used, the validity of the survey items were not adequately established. For example, adding more student portfolio statements to the four surveys used in this study would help clarify the meaning of portfolios and the important role they play in the teaching and learning process. As a result, this would have made the surveys used more functional. This is because some

participants do not know the many advantages of using portfolios as a good continuous means of assessment. Second, the number of participants who were interviewed was small. Increasing the number of interviewees in each group would not only give the chance to gather more views and opinions related to the use of student portfolios in the assessment process in Omani schools, but also would result in a more reliable and valid study.

However, as the first study to investigate the attitudes of teachers, supervisors, parents, and students toward the use of student portfolios in Omani schools, this study provides a good basis for other studies to build on. This study has provided some insight into the reasons why teachers are not using student portfolios in schools as a supportive means of assessment besides test results. It has also opened new doors to expand on the attitudes of teachers, supervisors, and parents, as well as students, towards the use of portfolios in Omani governmental schools.

Generally, the research has shown that all four participating groups are aware of the importance of portfolios and their advantages for students and teachers. Further research is needed to clarify how supervisors and school administrations can encourage teachers to use portfolios and provide training in how to use them. Also, further studies can investigate the ways that teachers can involve students and their parents in the process of designing and evaluating portfolios as effective means of measuring students' progress and achievements.

Some suggestions are offered in the next section for teachers, supervisors, parents, and students to help promote and improve the use of student portfolios in the assessment process in Omani schools.

Implications of the Study

Implications for Teachers

Many teachers claimed that heavy school duties and being overloaded with other administrative work were some of the reasons that may stop teachers from using portfolios in the assessment process. It is true that most teachers teach more than five periods a day, plus being in charge of other school activities, but from my own experience as a teacher who has been teaching for six years so far, I think they can

manage that. For example, teachers who have a big number of students can assess students through portfolios regularly by meeting two to three students face to face at the beginning of each lesson. By doing this, students will have the habit of keeping portfolios. As one teacher interviewed noted, “I specify five minutes from each class to assess two students.” Another teacher interviewed said, “By decreasing school work I can focus more in using portfolios.” He may have meant that if teachers did not have heavy school duties, they would have more time to focus on the usage of portfolios in the classroom.

In addition, teachers consider not receiving enough encouragement and support from school administrations and supervisors to be one of the main factors that hinder them from using portfolios. I would strongly advise teachers to meet with their supervisors and schools administrations and tell them what kind of support and encouragement they expect in order to accomplish their job. This would ensure that supervisors will convey teachers’ needs to the officials in the Ministry of Education in order to be studied and applied. Also, when a supervisor comes to visit a school, teachers should discuss what problems they face while using portfolios to find good solutions. Some new teachers, who may be using portfolios for the first time, may feel embarrassed to ask even if they did not understand how to assess students through portfolios.

It is also important for teachers of the same school to try to meet and discuss any misunderstandings regarding the use of portfolios. They can also ask for help from senior teachers or other experienced teachers if they cannot contact their supervisor. Also, reading online journals, published articles, and other related recent research in assessing students through portfolios can be of great support. Thus, through this kind of teachers’ self-learning, they will expand their personal knowledge and will enrich other teachers’ understanding in the same school. One of the teachers saw this as a possibility and wrote, “Reading online journals and other published articles can help me to understand how portfolios should be used in class.”

Moreover, teachers must make a stronger effort to encourage their students to have personal portfolios. A teacher might bring a sample portfolio to be used as a model, so the rest of the class will understand what a portfolio looks like and what materials can be put into it. They have to explain to students and to parents through

school meetings the advantages of having personal portfolios in creating better learners who are responsible for their own learning. Also, teachers must interview students while assessing their work and follow up with a short report to inform parents of the progress of their children. By doing this, both parents and students will feel the importance of developing good portfolios as part of the assessment process, and then they will take portfolios as seriously as they do traditional tests.

Implications for Supervisors

According to the results of the supervisor survey and interviews, all of them agreed that portfolios are a necessary part of the assessment process, but as a secondary means besides paper and pencil tests. They agreed that heavy school duties, lack of caring of some teachers, and the need for training courses are the main reasons that make teachers ignore the significant role of portfolios in the classroom. Although while visiting schools supervisors report that they do check if teachers are following the guidelines of the assessment document, they do not check to see if teachers are actually using portfolios adequately. Supervisors should meet with each other in order to decide what and how to explain to teachers the best way of using and assessing students through portfolios. They could do this through short meetings with teachers, by conducting workshops, by giving lectures or related seminars, or by introducing some online journals or recent published articles, as well as by giving guidance through models.

Another suggestion is to visit teachers and observe them inside the classroom while the teachers are using and assessing students through portfolios. Then, they could follow up the observation with a post discussion stage that contains feedback, guidelines, and comments. Because it is supervisors' responsibility to help teachers, I encourage supervisors to build a good rapport with their teachers, especially the new ones. This kind of relationship may help teachers to feel more secure and confident to discuss any problems they face while using portfolios. As a result, teachers will notice supervisors' support and encouragement. Also, every supervisor should encourage teachers to involve parents as much as possible by sending reports, issuing letters, or inviting parents to school meetings to give them a clear picture of using portfolios as a supportive means of assessment along with traditional tests. So, informing parents is

important to get their help at home to support children to keep well organized personal portfolios.

Implications for Parents and Students

The results of the student and parent surveys as well as the responses of parents' interviews revealed that parents and students are in favor of using portfolios in schools as evidence of students' work. But both groups believed that portfolios should be used only as an additional means of assessment to support test results. Parents should always keep in touch with teachers and with the administrations of the schools. They should attend parents' meetings regularly in order to know if anything has been changed or added to the educational system in general or to the assessment process in particular. Also, parents should not focus only on test results to know the progress of their children, but they should take the reports that they receive at the end of each semester seriously because these reports give holistic views of students' development and achievements through the whole semester. In addition, parents should encourage their children to keep organized portfolios by giving them advice, guiding them while doing portfolio work, and observing them closely until children establish a habit of developing neat portfolios. Thus, the children will feel the importance of having good personal portfolios that they can be proud of in front of their parents and other students in the classroom.

It is also important for students to trust the power of having personal portfolios in creating better and more responsible learners. By paying attention to teachers' comments and suggestions when developing portfolios, students can design good portfolios that can be used as valid means of assessment like traditional tests. When students look at portfolios seriously, in the same way they look at tests, and when they accept teachers' and parents' encouragement and support, they will keep good portfolios of their work.

Final Thought

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the importance of portfolios in assessing students in Omani schools as a secondary means of assessment besides traditional tests. Because all of the participating groups believed in the power of

portfolios, the best way to promote their use is to encourage teachers, supervisors, parents, and students to cooperate and work together as a team in order to achieve valid assessment of students' proficiency and development.

Teachers need to overcome the problems that may hinder the usage of portfolios with the support of supervisors and school administrations. Supervisors are the links that connect teachers in schools with the officials in the Ministry of Education, so it is their responsibility to provide the support and encouragement that teachers need to evaluate students' use of portfolios effectively and professionally. Parents should be involved in the assessment process by keeping themselves well informed about how their children are going to be assessed through portfolios. Also, they should encourage their children to consider portfolios to be as important as traditional tests. Students, with their parents' help, should follow teachers' comments and suggestions to develop good portfolios that really represent their proficiency level.

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Appendix A: Omani Teachers' Attitudes toward Student Portfolios

This survey will help me to understand Omani Teachers' views toward the use of student portfolios in schools. I would greatly appreciate the following information. Please tick the appropriate option.

Please note that all the personal information will remain confidential and it will be used only in my MA TESOL thesis.

- Gender: Male Female
- Age (Optional) : _____
- Levels teaching now: Elementary Preparatory Secondary
- Years of Experience as a teacher: _____ years
- Marital status: Single Married
- Are you: Teacher Senior Teacher

Would you like to be interviewed with me for about 15 minutes in order to discuss, in depth, your answers? This process may give me the chance to learn more about student portfolios in Omani schools.

- Yes, I would like to be interviewed.
- No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

If yes, please write your name and contact information:

Name: _____

Phone or e-mail address: _____

Survey Instructions

Dear Teachers,

1. Read each statement below carefully and place a tick (✓) that best represents your opinions in the appropriate column.
2. Answer all statements, and make sure you tick only one box for each statement.
3. Please provide answers for the two questions at the end of this survey.
4. Please be as honest as you can in responding.
5. You can write your answers for the two questions either in English or Arabic.

Thank you for your participation.

Read each statement carefully and tick (✓) only the box that best represents your opinion in the appropriate column.

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Assessing students' progress and achievement these days requires more than test results and teachers' comments.				
2	Student portfolios are a necessary part of the educational system.				
3	I think using student portfolios in schools is an important new assessment technique.				
4	Teachers need more than one method to assess students fairly.				
5	Paper and pencil testing can not give a complete view of students' performance in class.				
6	Sometimes I feel that the results of traditional tests are not enough to judge students' achievements.				
7	Portfolios can provide an honest representation of student's weaknesses and strengths.				
8	Student portfolios can be a good way to assess students' proficiency levels.				
9	Student portfolios can assess students better than traditional testing.				
10	Student portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment besides testing.				
11	Student portfolios should involve teachers, students, and parents during the assessment process.				
12	Parents have the right to know how portfolios are going to be used during the assessment process.				
13	Teachers should write constructive comments to the parents about the progress of their children's portfolio.				
14	Parents should be taught how to participate in the assessment process of their children's portfolio.				
15	Parents should not be involved in the portfolio assessment.				
16	Portfolios can help students to be responsible for their own learning.				
17	It is important for each student to design his/her own personal portfolio to be used as reference in later classes.				
18	Portfolios can be the mirror that reflects the quality of teachers' instruction.				
19	Portfolios can assist students to become better evaluators of their own work.				
20	Bias can be reduced when teachers assess students through authentic materials such				

	as portfolios.				
(table continues)					
Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
21	When assessing student portfolios teachers should focus not only on the product, but also on the process itself.				
22	Teachers should not consider the quantity of students' portfolios, but the depth of their contents.				
23	Designing good portfolios teaches students to be responsible.				
24	Designing good portfolios teaches students to take pride in their own work.				
25	It is important for teachers to interview students at the end of the portfolio process to assess students fairly.				
26	The best way to present the idea of having a portfolio to a class for the first time is to use a ready made one as an example.				
27	I do not know how to assess students through portfolios.				
28	Teachers need support and special training courses in order to assess student correctly throughout portfolios.				
29	Teachers are the only ones who can determine what should be included in student portfolios.				
30	One of the difficulties teachers face while dealing with student portfolios is where to store them.				
31	Because students are responsible for their own learning, they should store their portfolios in a safe place by themselves.				
32	Most teachers do not like using student portfolios because it is a waste of time and effort.				
33	Because most teachers teach to the test, they do not care about student portfolios.				
34	Creating portfolios is a challenge for students.				
35	Student portfolios are an unnecessary load that is added to the assessment process in our schools.				
36	The Ministry of Education and school administrations do not do enough to encourage teachers to use portfolios.				
37	Supervisors do not value teachers' use of student portfolios.				
38	Some parents are not convinced that their children should be assessed through portfolios.				
39	Actually, I do not believe in the power of portfolio.				
40	I usually depend on test results only in assessing students' progress.				

41	I assess students through their portfolios regularly.				
(table continues)					
Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
42	Portfolios are important means of assessment because they give teachers a holistic view during the continuous assessment of students' achievements.				
43	Heavy school duties and shortage of time should not stop teachers from using student portfolios during the assessment process.				
44	If I had the needed training, support, and encouragement to deal with student portfolios appropriately, I would use them as an additional means of assessment beside traditional testing.				

Please answer the following questions. (You can write on the back of this paper if necessary.)

1. Have you ever assessed your students by using their portfolios? Why or why not?

2. What are the problems you face, as a teacher, that can prevent you from the usage of student portfolios as a part of the assessment process?

Thank you for your time in filling out this survey

Appendix B: Supervisors' Attitudes toward Student Portfolios

This survey will help me to understand Supervisors' views toward the use of student portfolios in schools. I would greatly appreciate the following information. Please tick the appropriate option.

Please note that all the personal information will remain confidential and it will be used only in my MA TESOL thesis.

- Gender: Male Female
- Age (Optional) : _____
- Marital status: Single Married
- Years of experience as a supervisor: _____ years
- Years of experience as a teacher: _____ years
- Levels supervising now: Elementary Preparatory
 Secondary All levels

Would you like to be interviewed with me for about 15 minutes in order to discuss, in depth, your answers. This process may give me the chance to learn more about how teachers and students use portfolios at schools.

- Yes, I would like to be interviewed.
- No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

If yes, please write your name and contact information:

Name: _____

Phone or e-mail address: _____

Survey Instructions

Dear Supervisors,

1. Read each statement below carefully and place a tick (✓) that best represents you in the appropriate column.
2. Answer all statements, and make sure you tick only one box for each statement.
3. Please provide answers for the two questions at the end of this survey.
4. Please be as honest as you can in responding.

Thank you for your participation.

Read each statement carefully and tick (✓) only the box that best represents your opinion in the appropriate column.

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I think the use of a single grade to represent achievements of students is not enough.				
2	I think portfolios are a necessary part of the assessment process in the educational system.				
3	Students' portfolios are vehicles for continuous improvements.				
4	Portfolios can develop self-assessment skills of students.				
5	Supervisors should not rush teachers to use portfolio assessment until teachers understand how they can deal with portfolios appropriately.				
6	From my own experience, student portfolios can provide teachers with a more holistic assessment than traditional assessment.				
7	When I visit schools, I always check if my teachers are using student portfolios during the assessment process.				
8	I believe that student portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment besides traditional testing.				
9	Teachers need support and training courses to know how to assess students' performance through portfolios.				
10	Most teachers do not care about their students' portfolios.				
11	Many teachers think that portfolios are only files that students keep their work in.				
12	Students portfolios can strengthen the relationship between teachers, parents, and students.				
13	Teachers do not have the time to use student portfolios in the assessment process because of their heavy school duties.				
14	I am convinced that teachers should assess students through portfolios in addition to testing.				

Please answer the following questions. (You can write on the back of this paper if necessary.)

1. Have you ever encouraged your teachers to use student portfolios in the assessment process? Why or why not?

2. What are some of the reasons that prevent your teachers from using student portfolios in schools as an effective means of assessment?

3. How can you support your teachers and convince them to use student portfolios to assess students' progress and achievement in class?

Thank you for your time in filling out this survey.

Appendix C: Parents' Attitudes toward Student Portfolios

This short survey will help me to understand parents' views toward the use of student portfolios in schools. I would greatly appreciate the following information. Please tick the appropriate box.

Please note that all the personal information will remain confidential and it will be used only in my MA TESOL thesis.

• Gender: Male Female

• Age (Optional) : _____

• Level of Teaching: None Elementary

Preparatory Secondary University

• How many children, who are studying in Omani governmental schools now, do you have?

• If any, in what grades? _____

Would you like to be interviewed with me for about 15 minutes in order to discuss, in depth, your answers? This process may give me the chance to learn more about how you feel about your child's portfolio.

Yes, I would like to be interviewed.

No, I would prefer not to be interviewed.

If yes, please write your name and contact information:

Name: _____

Phone or e-mail address: _____

Survey Instructions

Dear Parents,

1. Read each statement below carefully and place a tick (✓) that best represents your opinion in the appropriate column.
2. Answer all statements, and make sure you tick only one box for each statement.
3. Please provide an answer for the question at the end of this survey.
4. Please be as honest as you can in responding.

Thank you for your participation.

Read each statement carefully and tick (✓) only the box that best represents your opinion in the appropriate column.

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Traditional tests are better than student portfolios in assessing the progress of my child.				
2	I really do not know if my child has a portfolio or not.				
3	Students portfolios are a powerful means to asses students' progress.				
4	I prefer my child to be assessed using traditional testing instead of portfolios.				
5	I feel that my child does not take care of his/her portfolio.				
6	I do not know if my child's portfolio is part of the assessment process in the school.				
7	I think it is important to understand how my child is assessed through portfolios.				
8	I think portfolios can be good evidence of students' work.				
9	Portfolios should be used as a second means of assessing students beside traditional tests.				
10	I do not believe in portfolios because they waste time, effort, and money.				

Please answer the following question.

1. Describe either a good or bad experience you have had with your child regarding his/her portfolio in school. (Please write at least a few sentences.)

Thank you for your time in filling out this survey.


Appendix D: Students' Attitudes toward Portfolios

Please complete the background information below. Do not write your name on this paper.

• Gender: Male Female

• Age: _____

• Grade: _____

First, read the following statements and draw a smiley face  in the box that you think is appropriate for each statement.

Item	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	My teacher does not give me a lot of exercises related to my portfolio.				
2	My teacher does not encourage me to develop a good portfolio.				
3	My parents do not care about my portfolios.				
4	My parents help me with my portfolio.				
5	I want to be assessed through traditional tests instead of portfolios.				
6	I consider portfolios as supportive tools of assessment besides traditional testing.				
7	I think having a portfolio of my best work could help me to be a better learner.				
8	I feel that my portfolio represents what I have learned in class.				
9	I do not want to have a portfolio because it needs a lot of time and effort.				
10	I would like to have a good portfolio containing my best work.				

Second, write short answers to the following questions. (You may write on the back if necessary.)

1. What do you like best about having a personal portfolio of your good work?

2. Is there anything you do not like about having a personal portfolio of your good work?



Thank you for your Answers



Appendix E: Survey Results – Frequencies of Teachers’ Attitudes toward Student Portfolios (number of teachers = 44)

Calculating the average: Strongly Agree= 4, Agree= 3, Disagree= 2, Strongly Disagree=1

Item	Survey Statements
1	Assessing students’ progress and achievement these days requires more than test results and teachers’ comments.
2	Student portfolios are a necessary part of the educational system.
3	I think using student portfolios in schools is an important new assessment technique.
4	Teachers need more than one method to assess students fairly.
5	Paper and pencil testing can not give a complete view of students’ performance in class.
6	Sometimes I feel that the results of traditional tests are not enough to judge students’ achievements.
7	Portfolios can provide an honest representation of student’s weaknesses and strengths.
8	Student portfolios can be a good way to assess students’ proficiency levels.
9	Student portfolios can assess students better than traditional testing.
10	Student portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment besides testing.
11	Student portfolios should involve teachers, students, and parents during the assessment process.
12	Parents have the right to know how portfolios are going to be used during the assessment process.
13	Teachers should write constructive comments to the parents about the progress of their children’s portfolio.
14	Parents should be taught how to participate in the assessment process of their children’s portfolio.
15	Parents should not be involved in the portfolio assessment.
16	Portfolios can help students to be responsible for their own learning.
17	It is important for each student to design his/her own personal portfolio to be used as reference in later classes.
18	Portfolios can be the mirror that reflects the quality of teachers’ instruction.
19	Portfolios can assist students to become better evaluators of their own work.
20	Bias can be reduced when teachers assess students through authentic materials such as portfolios.
21	When assessing student portfolios teachers should focus not only on the product, but also on the process itself.
22	Teachers should not consider the quantity of students’ portfolios, but the depth of their contents.
23	Designing good portfolios teaches students to be responsible.
24	Designing good portfolios teaches students to take pride in their own work.
25	It is important for teachers to interview students at the end of the portfolio process to assess students fairly.
26	The best way to present the idea of having a portfolio to a class for the first time is to use a ready made one as an example.
27	I do not know how to assess students through portfolios.
28	Teachers need support and special training courses in order to assess student correctly throughout portfolios.
29	Teachers are the only ones who can determine what should be included in student portfolios.
30	One of the difficulties teachers face while dealing with student portfolios is where to store them.

31	Because students are responsible for their own learning, they should store their portfolios in a safe place by themselves.
32	Most teachers do not like using student portfolios because it is a waste of time and effort.
(table continues)	
Item	Survey Statements
33	Because most teachers teach to the test, they do not care about student portfolios.
34	Creating portfolios is a challenge for students.
35	Student portfolios are an unnecessary load that is added to the assessment process in our schools.
36	The Ministry of Education and school administrations do not do enough to encourage teachers to use student portfolios.
37	Supervisors do not value teachers' use of student portfolios.
38	Some parents are not convinced that their children should be assessed through portfolios.
39	Actually, I do not believe in the power of portfolio.
40	I usually depend on test results only in assessing students' progress.
41	I assess students through their portfolios regularly.
42	Portfolios are important means of assessment because they give teachers a holistic view during the continuous assessment of students' achievements.
43	Heavy school duties and shortage of time should not stop teachers from using student portfolios during the assessment process.
44	If I had the needed training, support, and encouragement to deal with student portfolios appropriately, I would use them as an additional means of assessment beside traditional testing.

#	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	21 48%	22 50%	1 2%	0 0%	3.45
2	20 45%	24 55%	0 0%	0 0%	3.45
3	11 25%	28 64%	5 11%	0 0%	3.13
4	26 59%	15 34%	3 7%	0 0%	3.52
5	21 48%	21 48%	2 4%	0 0%	3.43
6	18 41%	24 55%	2 4%	0 0%	3.36
7	7 16%	26 59%	10 23%	1 2%	2.88
8	7 16%	33 75%	3 7%	1 2%	3.04
9	6 14%	26 59%	11 25%	1 2%	2.84
10	10 23%	30 68%	4 9%	0 0%	3.13
11	14 32%	24 55%	4 9%	2 4%	3.13
12	11 25%	24 55%	7 16%	2 4%	3.00
13	14 32%	26 59%	4 9%	0 0%	3.22
14	8 18%	29 66%	6 14%	1 2%	3.00
15	6 14%	12 27%	21 48%	5 11%	2.43

16	16 36%	27 62%	1 2%	0 0%	3.34
17	18 41%	25 57%	1 2%	0 0%	3.38
(table continues)					
#	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
18	8 18%	29 66%	6 14%	1 2%	3.00
19	9 21%	34 77%	1 2%	0 0%	3.18
20	5 12%	26 59%	12 27%	1 2%	2.79
21	20 45%	18 41%	6 14%	0 0%	3.31
22	13 29%	27 62%	3 7%	1 2%	3.18
23	18 41%	22 50%	4 9%	0 0%	3.31
24	13 29%	27 62%	4 9%	0 0%	3.20
25	5 11%	37 85%	1 2%	1 2%	3.04
26	24 55%	13 29%	6 14%	1 2%	3.36
27	2 4%	14 32%	24 55%	4 9%	2.31
28	9 21%	30 68%	4 9%	1 2%	3.06
29	7 16%	18 41%	18 41%	1 2%	2.70
30	10 23%	13 29%	21 48%	0 0%	2.75
31	12 27%	18 41%	7 16%	7 16%	2.79
32	3 7%	11 25%	23 52%	7 16%	2.22
33	10 23%	12 27%	22 50%	0 0%	2.72
34	15 34%	18 41%	8 18%	3 7%	3.02
35	2 4%	14 32%	24 55%	4 9%	2.31
36	3 7%	22 50%	15 34%	4 9%	2.54
37	13 29%	17 39%	14 32%	0 0%	2.97
38	9 21%	30 68%	5 11%	0 0%	3.09
39	2 4%	6 14%	24 55%	12 27%	1.95
40	1 2%	14 32%	14 32%	15 34%	2.02
41	7 16%	7 16%	30 68%	0 0%	2.47
42	16 37%	26 59%	2 4%	0 0%	3.31

43	7 16%	30 68%	7 16%	0 0%	3.00
44	8 18%	35 80%	1 2%	0 0%	3.15

**Appendix F: Survey Results – Frequencies of Supervisors’ Attitudes
toward Student Portfolios (number of supervisors = 15)**

Calculating the average: Strongly Agree= 4, Agree= 3, Disagree= 2, Strongly Disagree=1

Item	Survey Statements
1	I think the use of a single grade to represent achievements of students is not enough.
2	I think portfolios are a necessary part of the assessment process in the educational system.
3	Students’ portfolios are vehicles for continuous improvements.
4	Portfolios can develop self-assessment skills of students.
5	Supervisors should not rush teachers to use portfolio assessment until teachers understand how they can deal with portfolios appropriately.
6	From my own experience, student portfolios can provide teachers with a more holistic assessment than traditional assessment.
7	When I visit schools, I always check if my teachers are using student portfolios during the assessment process.
8	I believe that student portfolios should be used as a second means of assessment besides traditional testing.
9	Teachers need support and training courses to know how to assess students’ performance through portfolios.
10	Most teachers do not care about their students’ portfolios.
11	Many teachers think that portfolios are only files that students keep their work in.
12	Students portfolios can strengthen the relationship between teachers, parents, and students.
13	Teachers do not have the time to use student portfolios in the assessment process because of their heavy school duties.
14	I am convinced that teachers should assess students through portfolios in addition to testing.

#	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	7 46%	6 40%	2 14%	0 0%	3.33
2	12 80%	3 20%	0 0%	0 0%	3.80
3	9 60%	6 40%	0 0%	0 0%	3.60
4	6 40%	9 60%	0 0%	0 0%	3.40
5	6 40%	8 53%	1 7%	0 0%	3.33
6	6 40%	9 60%	0 0%	0 0%	3.40
7	6 40%	7 46%	2 14%	0 0%	3.26
8	3 20%	12 80%	0 0%	0 0%	3.20
9	7 46%	8 54%	0 0%	0 0%	3.46
10	3 20%	7 46%	5 34%	0 0%	2.86
11	5 34%	7 46%	3 20%	0 0%	3.13
12	7 46%	8 54%	0 0%	0 0%	3.46
13	4 26%	6 40%	5 34%	0 0%	2.93
14	8	7	0	0	3.53

	54%	46%	0%	0%	
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Appendix G: Survey Results – Frequencies of Parents’ Attitudes
toward Student Portfolios (number of parents = 22)

Calculating the average: Strongly Agree= 4, Agree= 3, Disagree= 2, Strongly Disagree=1

Item	Survey Statements
1	Traditional tests are better than student portfolios in assessing the progress of my child.
2	I really do not know if my child has a portfolio or not.
3	Students portfolios are a powerful means to asses students’ progress.
4	I prefer my child to be assessed using traditional testing instead of portfolios.
5	I feel that my child does not take care of his/her portfolio.
6	I do not know if my child’s portfolio is part of the assessment process in the school.
7	I think it is important to understand how my child is assessed through portfolios.
8	I think portfolios can be good evidence of students’ work.
9	Portfolios should be used as a second means of assessing students beside traditional tests.
10	I do not believe in portfolios because they waste time, effort, and money.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	12 54%	8 36%	1 5%	1 5%	3.40
2	3 14%	6 27%	7 32%	6 27%	2.27
3	4 18%	5 23%	10 45%	3 14%	2.45
4	8 36%	8 36%	5 23%	1 5%	3.04
5	4 18%	11 50%	7 32%	0 0%	2.86
6	2 9%	12 54%	3 14%	5 23%	2.50
7	16 72%	5 23%	1 5%	0 0%	3.68
8	9 41%	9 41%	2 9%	2 9%	3.13
9	8 36%	13 59%	1 5%	0 0%	3.31
10	3 14%	10 45%	8 36%	1 5%	2.68

Appendix H: Survey Results – Frequencies of Students’ Attitudes
toward Portfolios (number of students = 58)

Calculating the average: Strongly Agree= 4, Agree= 3, Disagree= 2, Strongly Disagree=1

Item	Survey Statements
1	My teacher does not give me a lot of exercises related to my portfolio.
2	My teacher does not encourage me to develop a good portfolio.
3	My parents do not care about my portfolios.
4	My parents help me with my portfolio.
5	I want to be assessed through traditional tests instead of portfolios.
6	I consider portfolios as supportive tools of assessment besides traditional testing.
7	I think having a portfolio of my best work could help me to be a better learner.
8	I feel that my portfolio represents what I have learned in class.
9	I do not want to have a portfolio because it needs a lot of time and effort.
10	I would like to have a good portfolio containing my best work.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1	29 50%	9 16%	8 14%	12 20%	2.94
2	22 38%	25 43%	7 12%	4 7%	3.12
3	5 9%	7 12%	21 36%	25 43%	1.86
4	30 52%	15 25%	8 14%	5 9%	3.20
5	16 27%	9 16%	25 43%	8 14%	2.56
6	17 29%	26 45%	8 14%	7 12%	2.91
7	30 52%	19 32%	4 7%	5 9%	3.27
8	28 49%	24 41%	3 5%	3 5%	3.32
9	8 14%	3 5%	17 29%	30 52%	1.81
10	24 41%	23 40%	6 10%	5 9%	3.13

Appendix I: Semi-structured Interview Questions

Teachers

- 1) According to you what are your attitudes towards the use of student portfolios in the assessment process? Helpful? Effective?
- 2) Do you assess your students through portfolios regularly? Or you mainly depend on test results?
- 3) What are some of the reasons that stop you from assessing your students through portfolios in school?
- 4) Do you think parents are convinced of the power of portfolios in the assessment process? Are they cooperated?
- 5) Do you feel your supervisor is doing enough to support you with guidelines to help you in using student portfolios effectively?

Supervisors

- 1) Do you think your teachers are aware of the many advantages of student portfolios in the assessment process?
- 2) Do you think your teachers are using student portfolios regularly and effectively, although they are asked to do so?
- 3) What do you think are the problems that prevent your teachers from using student portfolios as a supportive means of assessment besides traditional tests?
- 4) Do you provide your teachers with guidelines in how to assess student portfolios?
- 5) What recommendations you give to your teachers regarding the use of student portfolios?

Parents

- 1) Do you think your child is interested to have a personal portfolio?
- 2) Would you like your child to be assessed using tests only or with student portfolios? Why or why not?
- 3) What are some of the problems that your children face when using their portfolios?
- 5) What do you expect from teachers regarding the use of student portfolios in schools?

VITA

Khalid Al-Amri is a senior teacher in a basic education school in the Sultanate of Oman. He has taught English for the past six years. He has a B.A. in English Language from Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat.

He also works as a regional trainer in the English Department in the Ministry of Education. He presents workshops and leads weekly sessions during the school year to prepare new teachers who are going to work in the basic education schools. Some of the topics which are discussed during these sessions are student portfolio organization and assessment, self-assessment techniques, independent learning strategies, and handwriting problems.

He presented "The Total Physical Response Method" at the RETIC Conference 2003: Regional English Teachers' International Conference in Sohar, Oman, and "The Meaning of Meaning" at the ETIC Conference 2004: English Teachers' International Conference in Muscat, Oman.