

QUALITY IN TEACHING THROUGH SELF ASSESSMENT

Berrington Xolani Siphosakhe Ntombela

SABIS University of Erbil,
Kurdistan- IRAQ.

zanibaz@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Students are central in the core business of institutions of higher learning. Due to the increase inter alia in competition, the value of teaching is increasingly becoming a determining factor of whether students will opt for one education institution or the other. This leaves teachers with a burden to enhance quality in teaching by reason of enriching student experience. This paper reports the exploration of utilising diary entries in conjunction with student feedback as means of self-assessment. These diary entries were started in the beginning of the semester, recording teacher's experience with teaching materials and student reactions to the materials and teaching approach. Student feedback was also conducted during the course of the semester on different timelines: some at the beginning of the semester and some towards the end of the semester. The results reveal students' attitude towards teaching methodology and the clash between course expectations and students' envisaged experience. The paper argues that students' expectations are largely influenced by past educational experiences, which they use as yardstick to measure success or failure in their current experience. Furthermore, the paper postulates that teachers' frustrations are impacted by expectations that are matched against students' experiences. The paper's main conclusion therefore is that quality teaching stands to improve when course delivery and outcomes are a negotiated process, taking into consideration students' experiences without compromising the envisaged course outcomes.

Keywords: Self-assessment, self-reflection, action research, diaries, quality teaching

INTRODUCTION

It is paramount that at the onset the impact of the teaching profession over eons is noted. Although it is possible to traverse that vast period in which the profession has developed and changed, the closest aspect that easily highlights teaching can be observed in the home where children, prior to attending formal education, are taught various aspects of life by family members. Once children 'graduate' from home education normally by reason of age, they start attending school where professionals take over, but with the continued support of family members, lack of which can be disastrous in the educational upbringing of the child. In that respect, teaching professionals, hereafter teachers, carry the heaviest burden of ensuring that, among other things, the lines of communication between the school and parents are constantly open as the progress of the child or failure thereof is normally attributed to the conscientiousness of the teacher or lack thereof. It is in that reality that teachers should invest heavily in improving their teaching skills to ensure that they are not unduly blamed when progress evades the learner. In fact, although such an improvement should be an individual prerogative, aiming at developing one professionally; in certain places like in the UAE as reported by Troudi (2008), professional development is imposed as teachers in primary and secondary schools are forced to undertake action research with particular focus on classroom methodology, which runs contrary to McNiff's (2002) principle of justice and democracy attributed to action research.

It must be further highlighted that in the educational process in general, as children progress to higher standards (classes) up to the exit level where they are inaugurated into tertiary institutions, the level of expectations shifts to lean heavily on the student than on parents, as it is generally the case with young learners. Much of the expectations by tertiary students are *inter alia* influenced by past educational experiences, whether good or bad, successful or unsuccessful which students use to gauge the probability of success or failure in the present learning experience. Students therefore expect that one teacher should or should not be like the other teacher from their past in terms of, say, teaching approach or methodology. This is one of the reasons why teachers need to determine the needs of current students and match that with individual learning styles, which further inform the best approach to be adopted. Nevertheless, even the tried and tested teaching approach may not land itself favourably with some students in the manner that the teacher had envisaged. It therefore behoves the teacher to reflect upon the adopted teaching approach, teaching materials and students reactions to such.

Self-reflection in teaching is one of the tools that undoubtedly have impact in improving teaching and learning. There are various ways in which that can be carried out. One such way is keeping a teaching diary, which although predominantly records personal experiences that help the teacher look back at the teaching and learning process, reflecting *inter alia* on feelings, frustrations, breakthroughs, etc. can and in many cases has become a source of data for research. The following discussion therefore situates self-reflection or self-assessment in the teaching profession by way of highlighting the use of diaries both as a self-assessment tool and as research data collection tool.

SELF-ASSESSMENT

For purposes of this paper, self-assessment and self-reflection will be used synonymously. Thus self-reflection is regarded as one of the ways in which an individual teacher could sustain development in the profession. This is the reason why, for instance, teacher trainers incorporate this aspect when training student teachers as reported by Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2010). Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (ibid), reporting the study based at Sultan Qaboos University about “training English language student teachers to become reflective teachers” (p. 41), contend that self-reflection should be attached to teaching, a practice that is well grounded in the profession. Indeed, a thorough example of reflection is provided by Al-Jadidi (2009) where she reflects upon her English language classes as part of her academic studies. In fact, the benefit of self-reflection is highlighted as allowing teachers and students to navigate through the teaching and learning process, focusing *inter alia* on attainment of outcomes and bettering reception and comprehension (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2010). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that in the process of teaching and learning, both teachers and students practise self-reflection.

Al-Mamari and Greenwood (2011) for instance, reported students’ and teachers’ reflection on the study they conducted about autonomy regarding tutorial centres for Foundation students in Sultan Qaboos University. In that respect, Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2010, p. 45) provide a list of ways extracted from several writers and researchers in which self-reflection could be carried out. These strategies are journals, narratives, diaries and notes, autobiography, teaching portfolios, action research, practical experience, collaborative talk, self-observation and observation of other teachers.

It should be further emphasised that self-reflection is not only widely used as part of interrogating teaching and learning process but also as a tool through which data are collected. The researcher in this study therefore, utilised diaries as a strategy for self-

reflection, which in combination with feedback from students became a source of data that informed the study. It is therefore fitting to locate the use of diaries in research, the discussion of which follows.

DIARIES IN RESEARCH

Scott and Usher (2004) locate diaries within biographical and autobiographical method along with other documents that record personal information “by or about individuals” (p. 117). Diary-focused research can either be qualitative or quantitative depending on the analysis, purpose, and design of the study (Scott & Morrison, 2007). In other words, diaries can represent an account of (an) individual(s) studied by the researcher or can be an exposition of the researcher’s account of events that can take the shape of a ‘researcher’s diary’ which recounts the process of the research as it progresses, or further be the record of the phenomenon under investigation. The latter applies to the research reported in this paper, as the diary entries are the record of self-reflection by the researcher with an aim of improving quality in teaching.

Like all other data collection tools and methods, diaries should be subjected to an analysis procedure, which as it has been mentioned, could either be quantitatively or qualitatively. When used to study other subjects, Scott and Morrison (2007) argue that diaries are normally accompanied by other methods, which could be interviews that are meant to triangulate the findings in diaries. In this study, diaries were used alongside student feedback. The analysis adopted in this study therefore, draws heavily from qualitative than from quantitative approach. That is, the text was the primary focus but the repeated occurrence of certain items was also considered. Most notable in this study is that the subject of investigation revolves around the researcher even though there is an obvious implication on students whose feedback does not only reveal their attitude and feelings about the researcher, but also about the courses they are studying and frustrations accompanying the whole teaching and learning process.

The above exposition situates the use of diaries and this research in particular within action research where according to McBeath (2010, p. 10) such a research is done by the practitioner and “is often referred to as practitioner based research; and because it involves [the practitioner] thinking about and reflecting on [his/her] work, it can also be called a form of self-reflective exercise.” Although there is criticism of action research, chief among which is that it is “of low professional standard” (Ellis, 1997, p. 197 cited in McBeath, 2010, p. 11) when compared to empirical research, some researchers believe that it is vital in addressing many teachers’ and students’ pedagogical concerns (McBeath, 2010). Indeed, such criticism permeates throughout the research sphere, but should be understood in the light of the fact that action research arguably challenges the tenets of traditional research by *inter alia* assuming that human beings in their studied situations are knowledgeable, and by the fact that they are active players in their situations as practitioners in the research process and not detached from it as it should be the case with a scientific researcher who must maintain an objective stance in the research process (Scott & Usher 2004, p. 37).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned, data in this study were collected by means of diary entries that the researcher maintained from 27th February 2011 to the 1st of June 2011. The diary entries were recorded after every session of the courses (in Table 1 below) offered by the researcher at Foundation and Post-Foundation levels at Caledonian College of Engineering.

Table 1. Courses in Diary Entries

<i>Course</i>	<i>Level</i>
Academic Writing	Foundation
Read Write Practical	Foundation
Language in the Lab.	Foundation
Speaking and Debate	Foundation
Conversation Skills	Foundation
English Skills Development	Post-Foundation

As mentioned, data collected through diaries were accompanied by feedback collected from students at both ends of the semester: somewhere near the beginning and towards the end of the semester. This feedback was recorded in a form distributed to students who were taking the courses in Table 1 above. The form had three subsections labelled: 'Stop', 'Start', and 'Continue'. A space at the bottom page of the form was provided for students to enter the module (course) name. It was explained to students that in the column labelled 'Stop' they were to record anything they felt the teacher should stop doing when delivering the course; in the space labelled 'Start' they should record what they felt the teacher was not doing when delivering the course and should start doing, and in the column labelled 'Continue' they should write what they felt the teacher was doing very well and should continue.

Although there were six courses as stated in Table 1 above upon which diary entries were recorded, students' feedback covered only three: Academic Writing, English Skills Development, and Speaking & Debate. It should be highlighted that out of the total of 77 students who were given feedback forms, only 18 returned them, which is obviously a small fraction that would make generalisation premature. In fact, these 18 students are a sum of 12 students out of 36 from Academic Writing part-time and full-time classes; plus 3 students out of 23 from an English Skills Development class; plus 3 students out of 18 from a Speaking & Debate class.

It must be noted that results based on a small sample like this are normally rejected because they are not considered as representative of the whole population. For instance, Kaboodvand (2009) conducted a study that investigated Iranian Young Learners' perceptions about the ideal language teacher. Kaboodvand (ibid), however, distributed a questionnaire to 48 students, who were not randomly selected and represented only 0.0005948% of the entire student population, obviously invalidating the sample. This is the main reason why Kaboodvand's (ibid) claim that "Iranian educational organizations...the language institutions...language teachers can use the findings of this research" (p.127) is rejected. Similarly, Coetzee-Van Rooy (2009) studied perceptions and intelligibility of English language proficiency among South Koreans speakers of English by having speakers of South African English evaluate that data. Similar to Kaboodvand's study, Coetzee-Van Rooy (ibid) managed to use only three (3) South Koreans subjects whose data was assessed by eighteen (18) South Africans. However, unlike Kaboodvand (op cit), Coetzee-Van Rooy (ibid) realises the limitation of her project and therefore cautions against rash generalisation of the findings.

Nevertheless, the validity of the study does not only depend on the sample size of the population. The design, objectives, type of data and data analysis are among the factors that must be considered for the validity and reliability of the study. For example, Seliger and Shohamy (1990) argue that the size of the population need not be an issue in a qualitative study where the objectives of the research are heuristic, i.e. the size of the subject population could be as small as one subject depending on the topic, design of the study and data that are the focus of the study. In that respect, Ntombela (2011) conducted a study that investigated the role of English Language teaching in combating cheating among Foundation students. The study aimed at establishing the occurrence of cheating and thereafter identifies reasons behind cheating. He (ibid) therefore argues that since the study is aimed at establishing “the presence of cheating behaviour and the attitude that cheating candidates have towards it so that corrective measures could be suggested” (p. 201), concern about the number of cheating students is irrelevant.

Furthermore, the distinction between empirical research and action research as proposed by McNiff (2002) must be considered. She (ibid) describes action research as a study where researchers investigate themselves as opposed to empirical research where the study focuses on other people. McBeath (2010), for example, after criticism from his colleague, decided to do action research trying to find out how much Arabic featured in his English language lessons. The study was purely about him, utilising data gathered in the form of his recorded teaching.

This is unlike Kaboodvand’s (op cit) and Coetzee-Van Rooy’s (op cit) studies discussed above that clearly fall within the ambit of empirical research. On the contrary, the study reported in this paper, as mentioned previously, falls within action research, where the practitioner sets out to investigate own teaching by analysing diary entries generated as part of self-reflection, and students’ feedback about what they want the practitioner to stop, start and continue doing in delivering lessons. Since the study is about the practitioner who wants to improve quality in own teaching, it is the quality of data rather than the quantity that underpins the results and interpretation. Therefore the findings obtained in the study may not apply generally to other practitioners as data are specifically about the concerned practitioner. Nonetheless, the process that the practitioner went through, i.e. self-reflection and action research, in finding means of improving quality in own teaching would be of immense benefit to fellow teachers.

Before presenting data on diary entries and students’ feedback on the three courses, it is essential to briefly narrate the learning outcomes and the teaching strategy on these courses, which will be helpful in contextualising students’ comments.

Academic Writing

This course, as mentioned, is offered at Foundation level and its main aim is to provide support to students in producing a 1500-word essay that is properly researched and referenced. The kind of essay that students must produce is the one where, with reasons and examples, they express counter arguments before expressing own opinions that are equally supported by research evidence. Therefore, among the learning outcomes envisaged in this course, students are expected to be able to apply the six-step approach to writing; locate and use sources either in the library or Internet; use the Harvard system of referencing; paraphrase and summarise a source; and use signpost words to make a text coherent and cohesive (Language & Learning 2 Module Handbook, n.d.).

The teaching and learning strategy employed in this course is through teacher-led activities where students apply a six-step method in planning, drafting and finally presenting a 1500-

word essay. It should be highlighted that when building up towards the final essay, students have to complete a series of up to ten assignments, most of which address each stage of the six steps i.e. thinking (brainstorming), researching, planning, writing, editing, and presenting. Therefore, to pass the course students are expected to clear all the assignments (Language & Learning 2 Module Handbook, n.d.).

English Skills Development

Unlike the previous course, this one is offered to students at Post-Foundation level 1 who are registered for a Chemical Engineering degree. Its main aim is to develop students' ability to deliver academic texts at college level; and to equip them with research tools, research methodology, different kinds of reports including engineering project report, which must be produced by the end of the course duration (Premkumar, 2010).

The learning outcomes outlined in the course include examining the development of a topic through paragraphing; developing tools for analysing essay questions; demonstrating understanding of formats within a range of text types; working with a range of cohesive devices; and investigating further grammatical issues (English Skills Development 2 Module Descriptor, n.d).

The teaching and learning strategy employed in the course is mainly class lectures and presentations, nevertheless seminars and guest lectures are listed as some of the strategies to be used. The course is assessed through coursework where students must submit a total of three assignments (two weighing 25% and the final counting for 50%) in order to pass the course.

Speaking and Debate

Like Academic Writing, Speaking & Debate is offered at Foundation level, but with an aim of equipping students with oral skills so that they could take part in academic discussions. Therefore, most of the training during the course covers the art of persuasion, presentation and academic debate. The learning outcomes that must be achieved by the end of the course duration range from developing analytical and critical thinking skills, fluency, using modal verbs to persuade and present an argument, researching to support an argument, evaluate and rebut a counter-argument, to using technology to present information, engaging an audience with appropriate body language, and responding to questions posed by the audience (Language & Learning 2 Module Handbook, n.d.).

The course is primarily taught through practice; i.e. students, after being introduced to the debate component, practise the skills, which are peer and teacher evaluated. The assessment of the course therefore takes into consideration roles that students assume in the debate team, which could be researcher, writer, or speaker; needless to say that by the end of the course duration, each student would have played each of the roles.

Diary Entries Data

It is now fitting to present data, first generated from selected diary entries on the three out of six courses offered by the researcher (in Table 1 above), then data generated from students' feedback on the three courses mentioned earlier. The presentation of data derived from selected diary entries reflects the course and date, and appear in the following sequence: Academic Writing (Table 2); Speaking and Debate (Table 3); and English Skills Development (Table 4).

Table 2. Academic Writing Diary Entries

Academic Writing

28 February 2011

Preface is simply an introduction to the course. It gives the outline of the course and tries to link it with the six steps from Project F1. F2 programme outline is attached however inaccurate (doesn't reflect what is covered in F2). It also presents the assessment criteria for AW. Unit 1 however is introduction proper – covering justification why writing is relevant for engineers. It seems that's based on the assumption that students would question the relevance of writing in an engineering institution, which I suspect is an incorrect one. The approach forges an integration of the four skills viz. speaking, writing, reading and listening (although this one is implied during a role-play). There's interestingly very less writing for a writing course. The other section justifies the importance of spelling in writing, which I also consider to be at a tangent in comparison to real writing issues. This somehow shows the slant towards the elevation of mechanics over the generation of writing.

2 March 2011

I completed the unit we left the previous lesson. The activity meant to further emphasise the importance of spelling in writing, which was highlighted through a newspaper article. The other part was a role-play where students needed to find out why and when do engineers need to write in English. The question is still whether so much speaking and reading in a writing course is logical.

5 March 2011

Unit 2 that we started today is sort of BPM revision as all students dealt with it in F1. The justification [for] such a lengthy revision is presumably in anticipation of those [who] didn't go through F1, which could be the case in other classes. The revision is rather more theoretical than practical, which I find not so effective. I think it would have been better if students were applying the six steps on the actual task of summarising rather than waiting until they had gone through the theoretical editing stage. The next lesson would be about writing, highlighting the tense and editing stage before the actual writing.

6 March 2011

We completed writing stage – looking into grammar – and editing where students went through the marking guide to make sure they'd attend to expectations. I explained the marking guide emphasising those elements that had to be in the summary. They were given twenty minutes to complete summary writing. Oddly, they give their summary [to classmate] who is supposed to correct it but using a marking guide that the teacher will also use. After the peer had corrected the summary it is handed to the teacher. If the student's mark is not final and does not help the author to improve on the writing, the whole point of peer correction is defeated. What's the point of giving them the summary to mark if the marks and the comments are not going to be used? By the way, they have to write in pens and not pencils for fear that they'll change writing; the presented work thus becomes ugly with students erasing pens every now and then. I don't think the dynamics of writing are being considered.

Table 3. Speaking and Debate Diary Entries

Speaking and Debate

5 March 2011

This was the first session of the debate component meant to be introductory. There is an attempt to incorporate the six step method, which I don't think is successful. For instance the task appearing under researching stage is presented in the form of a spider diagram which is normally used in the brainstorming session. In this session I tried to emphasise the importance of backing up every assertion with reason grounded in practical examples. The session ended with the terminology used in debate.

13 March 2011

A quick recap on what was done previously was made, emphasising the need to take a position, give reasons for that position and provide practical examples to support reasons given. It was further emphasised that the day's session was for demonstrating structure of a debate by watching live debate. The video was therefore shown, highlighting the sequence followed in the debate. Vocabulary used in the debate was first taught before playing the video. Evaluation forms were issued to be collected the following day.

Table 4. English Skills Development Diary Entries

English Skills Development

1 March 2011

The course starts an emphasis on plagiarism and referencing. It's logical start given the fact that they'll do a lot [of] searching and researching for their assignments. The main task was on paraphrasing the ten rules for avoiding plagiarism, which exercise was meant to instil the importance of citing visited sources. Prior to all of that it was highlighted that failure to submit first drafts has been the downfall of many previous candidates.

2 March 2011

The lesson was about referencing. The objective was to highlight in-text referencing versus bibliographic entry. Students were given an example of an in-text citation. However, the exercise appeared repetitive and some students found that boring, in retrospect it might help to bring a variety of citations that students could work with.

8 March 2011

Today the lesson covered Bibliography according to the Harvard system of referencing. Students were given the conventions of Harvard referencing and an exercise there they required to arrange the given information according to the learnt referencing system. The presentation of the conventions appeared somehow monotonous, but the exercise made students more engaged. The exercise however didn't cover all the learned aspects especially referencing from an online source which students will be likely using.

9 March 2011

The focus for today was on definition essay. Students were given the definition of what that kind of essay is. Some exercises that analysed aspects of definition essays were done with notable enthusiasm from students. Emphasis was put on the importance of including the term, general class and specific characteristics of the term. Also it was mentioned that relative clauses differentiates specific characteristics from general class.

STUDENTS' FEEDBACK DATA

Data collected through students' feedback are presented, starting with Academic Writing (Table 5), then Speaking & Debate (Table 6) and later English Skills Development (Table 7). It should be reiterated that Academic Writing candidates were both from part-time and full-time classes, but only full-time candidates were considered for other courses. A comment that is made by more than one student is indicated by a multiplied number of students in brackets (e.g. Deadline (X2)).

Table 5. Academic Writing Students' Feedback

<i>Academic Writing</i>		
Stop	Start	Continue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadline (X2) • Spelling • Long period for submitting assignment • Long class time • Studying theory in class • Doing practicals at home • Homework assignment research information in part-time is waste of time before coming to college • Practice not clear • Writing every time • Give assignment everyday • Give less time for writing • Deadline on Saturdays (better Sunday or Monday) • Read all steps in assignments • No comment (X2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give important things and leave out unimportant ones • Do more spelling • Give sample of each assignment in class before deadline • Learn English and speaking • Give more time to writing • Less work when starting new unit • Give all the meaning • Give a lot of examples for every assignment • Make practice easy and clear • Give a summary of the step in the assignment • Give main step for writing • How to get information from Internet or book • Study the step for doing assignment • No comment (X2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to do the essay • Practising writing (but in class) • Spelling vocabulary • Study the step further • A lot of practice • Using six steps everyday • Writing doing assignment step-by-step • Organising time • Record many English words • The strategy • Laugh and smiling face • Write a lot of assignments • Explain the topic of presentation • Special personality • No comment

Table 6. English Skills Development Students' Feedback

<i>English Skills Development</i>		
Stop	Start	Continue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving homework • Using only power-point presentation • No comments (X2) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving more time to submit homework (X2) • Make printout for the power-point to understand the lesson • Give more examples on the lesson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and power-point • Make power-point for the lesson • No comment

Table 7. Speaking and Debate Students' Feedback

<i>Speaking and Debate</i>		
Stop	Start	Continue
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having all students take part in the discussion • Having Arabic in class • No comment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make study more easier • Use different ways like games in class when explaining • Discuss cases that we will face in future • Explain difficult words • Make the lesson more active • Put more explanation about the topic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With more fun in class that makes the lesson more interesting and not boring • Having students share ideas with each other and the teacher • Having the teacher listen to students' opinions about the subject • Having more Speaking & Debate classes to improve speaking and conversation skills • No comment

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

Diary entries show teacher's preoccupation with course content. The reflection shows elements of the course and the teacher's interrogation of certain procedures. For instance, the teacher questions the dominance of other language skills at the expense of writing in the Academic Writing class. Furthermore, the teacher notes the prevalence of the theoretical aspect in the writing course where practising writing should dominate. The other aspect reflected upon regards peer correction in summarising where the mark given by peers is not considered. It should be understood that such reflections stem from the fact that the practice the teacher is reflecting upon is probably the same as with other teachers in other classes. It would have been different if, for instance, the course was only offered by the teacher in which case it would have been possible to leave out, say peer correction; but since it was a practice that was expected to be done across all classes, leaving it out would have subjected the students into a different experience than their other college mates. The teacher is therefore questioning the practice that is adopted by all teachers in the department who are perhaps not considering the implications.

As mentioned, the teacher reflects upon the dominance of other skills at the expense of writing, which is exacerbated by the dominance of theory over practice. This aspect is also recorded in students' feedback where they feel that studying theory in class should stop. The theory being referred to is the six-step method that is part of the Academic Writing learning outcomes, which students must be able to use in approaching a piece of writing. Perhaps the teacher's concern is that students should be doing a lot of writing practice, applying the method rather than delaying the practice until the theory is mastered. Nonetheless, from students' feedback it is gathered that practice does occur albeit at home. It looks like students would rather have the application of the method occurring in class with the teacher leading the way by means of providing multiple examples and leading them step by step. This is what Pihie *et al* (2007) regard as teacher-centred approach where quality teaching is measured in terms of "sound academic knowledge" (p. 114) because the teacher's main concern is with delivering information to predominantly passive students. With regards to the application of six-step method, the teacher does not dismiss that possibility except that the

application would rather be students' led. Nevertheless, it is clear that students were not against the six-step method *per se*; as some felt that practising six-step method everyday and writing a lot of assignments should continue.

Interestingly, power-point presentation had comments in all the three columns in English Skills Development. Students felt that it should not be the only way of delivering lessons; others wanted the teacher to make printouts of the slides, whilst others commended the use of power-point presentation for the lessons. These comments echo Premkumar Rao's (2008) conclusion that power-point presentation is a good supporting tool for English language teaching, but not a panacea in which case she advises that it should be balanced with other tools such as real objects, flashcards, or even the overhead projector. Notwithstanding, some students' request for printouts is reminiscent of Prensky's (2001) digital immigrants which he ironically associates with teachers; dealing a hard blow to his assumed student-digital natives of the 21st century!

As noted, students seemingly expected a more teacher-centred approach where, among other things, the teacher should explain in detail the topics for Academic Writing assignments, or for Speaking & Debate. Undoubtedly, there is pedagogic soundness in that thought, possibly, as noted previously, influenced by their previous experience; nonetheless, it should be weighed against learner-centred approach where the teacher acts as a guide and facilitator of the learning led by learners. In fact, Pihie et al., (2007) argue that at the heart of quality teaching in higher institutions are students constructing knowledge on their own with the teacher playing a facilitative role in that construction. In that respect they (ibid) explain that learning should be understood as occurring at three different levels where the first level is 'deep' representing an interaction with the subject using previous knowledge and experiences to give meaning; the second level is 'surface' and stands for that learning where meanings are instrumentally utilized in addressing the current needs; the third level is 'strategic' where learners combine the two levels (deep and surface) in order to get higher grades.

Furthermore, one student in a Speaking & Debate class wishes the teacher to stop other students from speaking Arabic in an English class. This reflects the conclusion drawn by Ntombela and Dube (2010) in the study about L1 in EFL context in Oman colleges, that whilst students admit that Arabic speeds up "understanding of the target language [they] favour an 'English only' policy" (p. 86). This ambivalence that is also reported among teachers in that study is influenced by monolingual fallacy, which postulates that L2 is best learnt and taught at the total exclusion of L1 (Canagarajah, 1999). This suggests that the teacher would need to control the amount of Arabic in an English language class, but must do so in a manner that acknowledges its benefit.

It should be highlighted that although there is logic in addressing some of the concerns raised by students such as explicitly pointing out diverse course delivery modes so that students do not feel that only one method is utilised, it is equally important to highlight the adopted teaching strategy that underpin the attainment of envisaged learning outcomes such as critical thinking and analytic skills. Such teaching strategies should be negotiated with the learners, as they are likely to get frustrated with what differs from their previous exposure. Navigating through learning outcomes should therefore take into account students' prior experiences and their expectations so that both parties work together towards quality education. For example, students should be made aware that the teacher will not explain every difficult word but will put the onus upon the learner to take responsibility of their learning.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented the use of diary notes as a tool for self-assessment alongside students' feedback. Inasmuch as there are many data collecting tools that would have been utilised, diary entries were used primarily as a self-reflection tool that in combination to students' feedback became the source of research data. It was further presented that this research does not follow the steps of the standard empirical research but lands itself into action research where the research is by and about the practitioner. Since the subject of investigation revolves around quality teaching, self-reflection is postulated as means of accomplishing that. That is, the researcher interrogates his approaches to course content delivery and uses students' feedback to reflect upon the same with an aim of forging better course delivery strategies that will improve quality of teaching.

Findings indicate that the teacher is primarily concerned with the content of course delivery as it is evident in diary notes where reflection centres on what was done with some observable challenges in the delivery process. The teacher was able to reflect upon students' reactions to certain tasks that did not interest them. Furthermore, diary notes reveal the teacher's dissatisfaction with certain procedures that were also practised by other teachers in the department for purposes of course delivery standardisation. These reflections are meant to facilitate improvement in quality teaching.

Students' feedback further shows areas that need attention: practices that must 'stop' 'start' and 'continue'. There is potential conflict between what students feel should stop or start with envisaged course outcomes. The logical explanation attributed to this conflict relates to students' past experiences, where most teaching and learning must have occurred under teacher-centred approaches. It is argued that learner-centred approach is the best in addressing some course outcomes such as critical thinking and analytical skills. This then calls for negotiating course delivery with students so that the teaching strategy is understood and received in the light of the envisaged course outcomes. When negotiating such a delivery, the teacher needs to acknowledge students' past exposure and experiences, which will catalyse improvement in quality teaching

REFERENCES

- Al-Issa, A. & Al-Bulushi, A. (2010). Training English language student teachers to become reflective teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 35(4), 41-64
- Al-Jadidi, H. S. (2009). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Oman: An exploration of English Language Teaching pedagogy in tertiary education*. (Doctoral dissertation). Melbourne: Victoria University.
- Al-Mamari, F. & Greenwood, L. (2011). *Towards autonomy: Tutorial centres for Foundation students*. Paper presented at the eleventh Oman International ELT Conference. Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resiting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Coetzee-Van Rooy, S. (2009). Intelligibility and perceptions of English proficiency. *World Englishes*, 28(1), 15-34.
- English Skills Development 2 Module Descriptor. (n.d). Muscat: Caledonian College of Engineering.
- Kaboodvand, M. A. (2008). Who do YLs consider an ideal language teacher? In B. Beaven (Ed.), *IATEFL 2008: Proceedings of the 42nd International Conference held in Exeter, UK* (7-11 April 2008). Canterbury: Kent IATEFL.

- Language and Learning 2 Module Handbook. (n.d). Muscat: Caledonian College of Engineering.
- McBeath, N. (2010). Action research: Investigating Jean McNiff's concise advice. *LC Forum* (Summer, 2010), 10-26. Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University.
- McNiff, J. (2002). *Action research for professional development: Concise advice for new action researchers*. Retrieved from http://www.waikato.ac.nz/tdu/pdf/booklets/24_AR.pdf
- Ntombela, B. (2011). English language teaching and the promotion of academic ethics. In J. Mukundan, V. Nimehchisalem, S. Menon, N. Jin Yu, N. Roslim, A.L.C Har, A. Philip, (Eds.), *ELT Matters 5: Developments in English language learning and teaching* (pp197-209). Serdang: Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Ntombela, B. X. & Dube, E. N. (2010). L1 in EFL context in Oman colleges. In N. McBeath (Ed.), *Current perspectives in ELT: New methodologies, research, and best practices: Proceedings of the tenth Oman International ELT Conference held in Muscat, Oman, 21-22 April 2010* (pp. 76-88). Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University.
- Pihie et al., (2007). Quality teaching in learning Business Studies at institutions of higher learning. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* (15) 2, 113-125.
- Premkumar, J. (2010). *English Skills Development 2 Module Descriptor*. Muscat: Caledonian College of Engineering.
- Premkumar Rao, J. (2008). Are power-point lessons the panacea for all educational woes? In S. Finlay & N. McBeath (Eds.), *Integration of skills: creative methods and techniques in ELT: Proceedings of the eighth Annual Oman International ELT Conference held in Muscat, Oman, 23-24 April 2008* (pp. 140-145). Muscat: Sultan Qaboos University.
- Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), 1-6.
- Seliger, H. W. & Shohamy, E. (1990). *Second language research methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Troudi, S. (2008). Reflection on action research. In A. Jendli, C. Coombe, and S. Troudi (Eds.) *Best practices in English language teaching* (pp. 433-445). Dubai: UAE TESOL Arabia.