SELF-ASSESSMENT FOR LANGUAGE TEACHERS[1]

By Simon Borg, ELT Consultant and Adam Edmett, The British Council

Students are very often encouraged to engage in self-assessment in the belief that this allows them to take ownership of their learning and contributes to the development of learner autonomy. Similar arguments apply to *teacher* self-assessment: by reflecting systematically on their competences, language teachers can become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and take more responsibility for their own professional development. In recognition of its value, teacher self-assessment is promoted in several education systems around the world; for example, the General Teaching Council for Scotland offers teachers a tool called a [self-evaluation wheel](). In other educational systems, such as Chile, teacher self-assessment is a formal component of teacher evaluation. In recent years, a number of frameworks have emerged which can support the use of self-assessment specifically for language teachers. Examples are the [European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages]() (EPOSTL), the [Cambridge English Teaching Framework](), and the [European Profiling Grid](). The British Council also has a self-assessment tool and we discuss this in detail below.

Teaching for Success

Teaching for Success is an approach to the professional development of language teachers developed by the British Council. It includes a CPD framework which has 12 professional practices, and each of these is broken down into more detailed "elements" which describe what a teacher is required to know and do as part of that professional practice. One of the instruments included in the CPD Framework is a [Self-Assessment Tool]() (SAT). The purpose of the SAT is to provide a measure of teacher competence which can be used by language teachers globally and which (ideally in conjunction with other measures) can inform subsequent decisions about teacher professional development. The SAT contains 48 elements (covering nine professional practices), each phrased in terms of teacher ability or knowledge. For each element[1], teachers self-assess by choosing one of these answers:

- The statement is not clear
- The statement is clear, but I'm not quite sure how to do this
- I can do this but not very effectively

---

1   This article is based on Borg, S. & Edmett, A. (2018). Developing a self-assessment tool for English language teachers. *Language Teaching Research*. [https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817752543]()

2   The wording varies in one section of the SAT.

- I can do this quite well
- I can do this very well

By completing the SAT and reviewing their responses (the online version generates a summary of these), language teachers can reflect on areas of their work which might provide a useful focus for ongoing professional learning.

As part of its development, the SAT was tested with a group of 1,716 teachers of English from around the world. The teachers were volunteers from a larger group who were enrolled on an online professional development course being offered by the Open University and the British Council. The teachers who completed the SAT worked in 125 different countries (57% in Europe and almost 19% respectively in Asia and the Americas) and taught at different levels of education from kindergarten to post-secondary. Over 82% of the respondents said that English was not their mother tongue and almost 85% were female.

We were interested in how teachers rated their own competences as well as in their feedback on the tool itself, and we discuss both of these issues below.

How teachers rated themselves

The Appendix lists all 48 items on the SAT according to the mean self-assessed competence on a four-point scale[2] where 1=low self-assessment and 4=high self- assessment. This shows that teachers' self-ratings were generally high, with the lowest mean being 2.37. The lower part of the list (i.e. the items where teachers rated their knowledge less highly) mainly includes items about 21st century skills (for example, critical thinking and problem solving), technology and assessment.
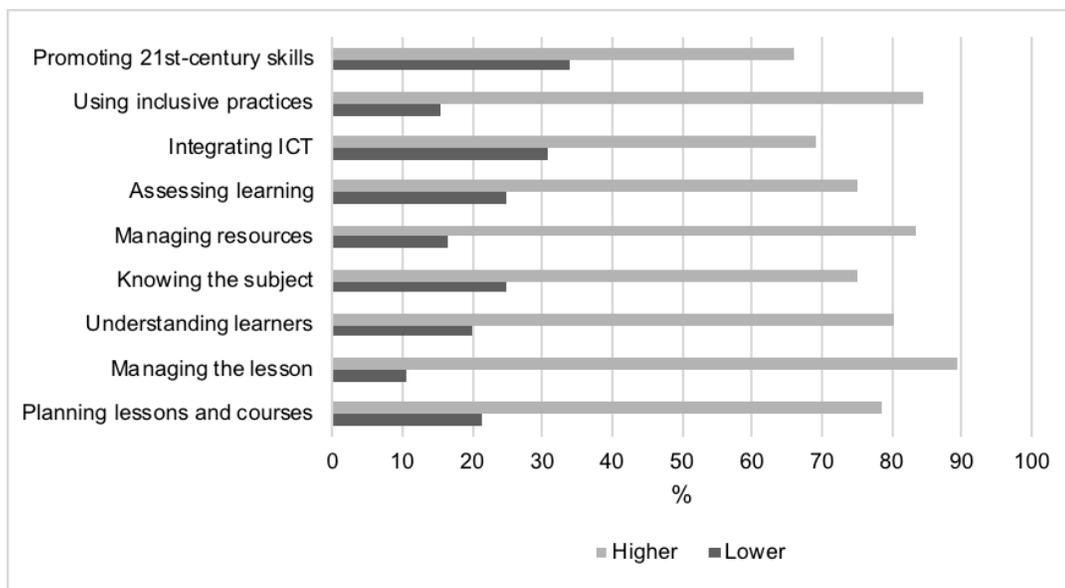

Figure 1: Summary of self-assessments on nine professional practices (Higher = "quite well" and "very well"; Lower = "not quite sure" and "not very effectively")

---

2   "The statement is not clear" responses were used to review the clarity of the SAT but not included in the overall calculations of how teachers assessed themselves.

Figure 1 summarizes teachers' self-assessments into two categories (low and high) for the nine professional practices on the SAT. Once again, the positive nature of teachers' responses is clear. "Managing the lesson" (89.4%), "Using inclusive practices" (84.5%) and "Managing resources" (83.5%) were the three practices with highest proportions of responses in the top two levels of self-assessment. "Promoting 21st-century skills" (33.9%), "Integrating ICT" (30.7%) and "Assessing learning" (25%) were the practices with the highest proportions of responses in the lower two levels of self-assessment.

Teachers' views about the SAT

Teachers were also asked a number of questions about the SAT and their responses are summarised in Table 1. These show that teachers felt that the SAT was relevant to their context, clear, and worth doing. Teachers agreed, too, that the SAT encouraged them to look for professional development activities and that they would recommend the SAT to a friend. Over 93% agreed or strongly agreed that the SAT covers most skills, knowledge and behaviours needed by teachers of English.

Table 1: Teachers' views about the SAT (%)

	N	Agree strongly	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
The self-assessment was relevant to my context	1,701	33.5	52.5	11.1	2.5	0.5
The self-assessment was clear and easy to understand	1,703	41.3	49.5	7.7	1.2	0.2
Completing the self-assessment is a worthwhile activity	1,699	34.9	41.6	19.2	3.8	0.5
The self-assessment has encouraged me to look for further professional development opportunities	1,699	44.2	36.3	15.4	3.7	0.4
I would recommend the self-assessment to a friend	1,694	36.6	37.4	20.1	4.8	1.1
The self-assessment includes most of the skills, knowledge and behaviours that an English teacher needs	1,705	40.0	53.3	5.7	0.9	0.2

The final item on the SAT allowed teachers to make any further comments. Responses were provided by 189 teachers and these included a range of both positive comments about the SAT as well as suggestions for improvement. In terms of positive comments, many were brief (such as "excellent" or "interesting") but some were longer (e.g. "This is a very credible way of evaluating oneself"). Many teachers also commented on the benefits of completing the self-assessment. Its value in promoting reflection on teaching and on areas for further development were mentioned several times. For example, one wrote that "I found it really

useful because it triggered some other questions about my practice," another explained that "it made me think about what I was really doing in my classrooms and things that I should review" and a third noted that "this made me reflect on my teaching practice."

Teachers also made suggestions for improving the SAT. One was that a wider range of answer options might be provided, particularly "not relevant or not applicable" (we discuss this below). Another observation by several teachers was that some of the items in the SAT were not relevant to specific kinds of language teaching. While, these comments came from a small proportion of respondents, they are important given that the SAT aims to be a tool for language teachers everywhere. Respondents noted, though, that some of the questions were not relevant to teachers who taught individual students, very young learners, in adult education settings, or who taught specific skills only such as speaking. Teachers also noted that sometimes there were factors in their context which constrained what they can do, particularly in relation to the professional practice "Integrating ICT". For example, one wrote that "I can use digital technologies but have no access to them in the classroom, so I wasn't sure how to reply" while another explained that "Using digital materials ... In my school as in most schools in my country I don't have an opportunity to use it very often and thus I can't grow professionally in this area."

Overall, though, while teachers did make suggestions for improving the SAT, their views about it were largely positive.

Discussion

We will focus on two issues emerging from our results. The first relates to the accuracy of teacher self-assessments. The second is about the feasibility of developing a tool that language teachers everywhere can use.

Accuracy of teacher self-assessments

In our trials of the SAT, teachers' overall assessments of their competence were high, with overall average rating across the 48 items of "I can do this quite well." One key question, then, that must be asked here, and which is relevant to self-assessment more generally, relates to the validity of these self-ratings: in other words, to what extent are teachers' responses to the SAT an accurate reflection of their actual abilities? This issue has been discussed with reference to students (for a review, see Brown, Andrade, & Chen, 2015) and various reasons for inaccurate self-assessments have been noted. In relation to teachers, three factors which might cause inflated self-assessments are (a) limited self-knowledge (i.e. lack of awareness of one's own competence); (b) threats to self-esteem (i.e. admitting to limited competence can make teachers feel uncomfortable or vulnerable); and (c) fear of consequences (i.e. concerns about what might happen as a result of a low self-assessment). Clearly, then, teacher self-assessment will be more productive when teachers are able to make valid judgements about their competence, comfortable with admitting there are areas of their work which can be improved, and in situations where the self-assessment does not

carry high stakes. In relation to this final point, an important distinction is that between formative and summative teacher evaluation (see, for example, Santiago & Benavides, 2009). While the former is concerned with improvement or development, the aim of the latter is to make a decision related to, for example, contract renewal or promotion. Summative teacher evaluation often has significant consequences for teachers and they will naturally want to report high self-ratings. There was evidence of this in Chile, where Taut and Sun (2014) analysed the use of self-assessments in a high-stakes teacher evaluation context and found that that score inflation was widespread. They thus recommended that "self-assessment should serve exclusively formative purposes" (p. 23). Teacher self-assessment is therefore more appropriate, and is likely to generate more accurate results, where the focus is on professional development rather than accountability.

Additionally, as teacher evaluation will be more effective when multiple measures are used (for a discussion of teacher evaluation more generally, see Borg, 2018), teacher self-assessment can be usefully combined with other indicators of what teachers can do, such as classroom observation (including peer observation) or a teacher portfolio.

Developing a global tool

The SAT seeks to be relevant to language teachers generally and while 86% of 1,701 teachers *did* agree that the SAT was relevant to their contexts, several did note that some of the items on it were not applicable. An obvious example is where teachers of adults were being asked about parental involvement. Another is the item which asks teachers if they can supplement the coursebook—some teachers may not use one. Eliminating such individual items would not necessarily resolve the problem given the diverse range of contexts and purposes that language teaching involves. So including a "not applicable to my context" option at this stage would be useful to identify in further trials which particular items are marked in this way, and such information could be used to further modify the items that are included under each professional practice. At the same time, though, the SAT mostly asks teachers about their competence—what they *can* do rather than what they *do* do—and for this reason including a "not relevant" option is problematic given that the items included in the SAT are seen to reflect competences required by language teaching professionals. This distinction between abstract competence and situated practice, though, may be too fine; we appreciate, too, that it is only natural for teachers to self-assess their competence by referring to their experience and accepting this may be the most productive way forward as the SAT is developed further. Overall, then, based on the insights emerging here, we would propose that a revision of the SAT include five response categories, including one for "not relevant" or "does not apply" responses plus the same four-point scale of self-assessed ability that was used here.

Conclusion

Self-assessment (whether via the kind of competence checklists we have discussed here or through other strategies) allows teachers to take more responsibility for the process of identifying their developmental needs. It is particularly useful in formative situations where the focus is on professional learning rather than high-stakes summative evaluations of teacher competence. Teacher self-assessment—especially in contexts where students are encouraged to do self-assessment—also allows teachers to practice what they preach. There are many good reasons, therefore, for organisations and teachers to use self-assessment as part of a broader approach to understanding professional competence and identifying ways of enhancing it.

References

Borg, S. (2018). *Teacher evaluation: Global perspectives and their implications for English language teaching. A literature review.* Delhi: British Council. https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/teacher-evaluation-global-perspectives-their-implications-english-language-teaching

Brown, G. T. L., Andrade, H. L., & Chen, F. (2015). Accuracy in student self-assessment: Directions and cautions for research. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice, 22*(4), 444–457. https://doi.org/10.1080/0969594X.2014.996523

Santiago, P. & Benavides, F. (2009). *Teacher evaluation: A conceptual framework and examples of country practices.* Paris, France: OECD.

Taut, S. & Sun, Y. (2014). The development and implementation of a national, standards-based, multi-method teacher performance assessment system in Chile. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 22*(71). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/1468/1313

Author Bios

Simon Borg is an ELT Consultant, specialising in the design, delivery and evaluation of professional development for language teachers. Website: http://simon-borg.co.uk. E-mail: s.borg@education.leeds.ac.uk

Adam Edmett is a Senior Consultant for the British Council and specialises in online education and teacher development. E-mail adam.edmett@britishcouncil.org

Appendix: Ranked means for 48 SAT items (N=1,716)

(1=low self-assessment; 4=high self-assessment)

Item	Mean
I treat all my learners equally and with respect.	3.68
I develop positive attitudes towards diversity in my classroom.	3.57
I understand my learners' level of English	3.45
I can create a positive learning environment.	3.42
I can give explanations that the learners are able to understand.	3.38
I can select materials from a range of different sources.	3.36
I can select activities which help meet the aims of the lesson.	3.27
I can give instructions effectively.	3.25
I can reflect on my own bias/beliefs and the impact this might have in the classroom.	3.23
I can select materials and resources based on learner needs.	3.22
I understand my learners' motivation to learn English	3.22
I can develop materials to supplement the coursebook I use.	3.20
I can check learners' understanding during the lesson.	3.19
I can give learners feedback on errors that helps them improve.	3.17
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach vocabulary to my learners.	3.13
I can monitor learner engagement.	3.12
I can evaluate the effectiveness of the materials and resources I use during lessons.	3.12
I can write lesson aims which describe the intended learning outcomes for a class	3.09
I understand my learners' interests	3.09
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach reading skills.	3.05
I can use a range of engaging techniques to introduce new grammar to my learners.	3.01
I help my learners identify individual learning goals.	3.01
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach my learners to speak English.	3.00
I promote collaboration and communication	3.00
I promote creativity and imagination	2.97
I can anticipate problems that may arise during the lessons and decide how to respond.	2.92
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach listening skills.	2.91
I can use technology confidently for the purposes of teaching English.	2.91
I can measure learners' progress effectively.	2.90
I can assess learners in a range of ways.	2.88
I understand my learners' preferred ways of learning	2.87
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach writing skills.	2.84
I can work with colleagues to design materials collaboratively.	2.84
I can describe how learner understanding will be assessed.	2.82
I can locate appropriate digital content effectively.	2.82

I can use digital tools effectively to help my students learn English.	2.82
I understand my learners' special educational needs	2.82
I can evaluate the quality of digital content.	2.81
I can describe how feedback on learner performance will be provided.	2.79
I can reflect on the effectiveness of the assessment I use.	2.79
I can use assessment results to inform subsequent teaching.	2.78
I can use technology to design and create teaching and learning materials.	2.78
I can use a range of engaging techniques to teach pronunciation to my learners.	2.73
I promote critical thinking and problem solving	2.66
I promote student leadership and personal development	2.66
I involve parents, learners and any other relevant persons in an inclusive learning environment.	2.64
I promote digital literacy	2.44
I promote citizenship	2.37