English language teaching reform in Sultanate of Oman: The case of theory and practice disparity

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Abstract   Sultanate of Oman is one out of many developing countries around the world which have valued English as a very important international language and a tool for achieving multiple purposes. When His Majesty the Sultan came to power in 1970, the government accepted English as the only official foreign language and allocated huge budgets and resources for its implementation through education. However, almost three decades after this, it was found that students exiting the ELT system in Oman suffer from various inadequacies in their English language proficiency, which has had negative implications for Oman's national development. This has driven the government to attempt to revolutionize English language teaching (ELT) through pursuing a reform plan—Basic Education System (BES). This paper attempts to examine the attitudes of 141 freshmen, who have exited the BES and joined Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in September 2009, about their teachers and the curriculum. The results have shown that there have hardly been any significant changes in the BES reform project, as compared to the previously implemented system—General Education System (GES) mainly due to implementation shortcomings.

Keywords   Sultanate of Oman · Reform · English language teaching · General education system · Basic education system · Teachers · Curriculum

> Education was my great concern, and I saw that it was necessary to direct efforts to spread education. We have given the Ministry of Education the opportunity and supplied it with our capabilities to break the chains of ignorance. Schools have been opened regardless; the important thing is that there should be education, even under the shadow of trees.
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> (From a speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said in 1972)

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You are aware of the extent of the attention we accord to the development of human resources in order to provide our young sons and daughters with wider and better opportunities of education, training and employment. There can be no doubt that the human being is the basic component and the cornerstone of any viable civilisation. We, therefore, once again reaffirm the importance of this element in the development and modernisation of society.

(From a speech of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said in 2006)

English language teaching (ELT) in Oman is a relatively new enterprise. It has been introduced to the Omani education system in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said came to the throne and started establishing the modern Omani nation-state. Oman has ever since acknowledged the importance of English, a *lingua franca* and the only official foreign language in the Sultanate, as a tool that serves multiple purposes locally and globally. English in Oman receives political, economic, and legislative support from the elite as represented in the government, which determines its place on the social hierarchy (Al-Issa 2002, 2006c). English in Oman has institutionalized domains like the business, education, and media (Al-Busaidi 1995) and is central to Oman's continued national development (Al-Issa 2002, 2006c, 2007b). People in Oman learn English for science and technology acquisition, pursuing higher education, travelling to non-Arabic and English-speaking countries, finding a white-collar job and cultural analysis and understanding (Al-Issa 2002, 2007b). The last purpose is best interpreted through watching Hollywood films and other English language programs and reading English language printed materials, which introduce Omanis to the English-speaking countries' cultures and help them see its different aspects through the tool of language.

However, facts and figures about ELT in Oman show that the vast majority of the students who leave Grade 12 and join different public and private higher education academic institutions lack the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in all four skills throughout the range of social, personal, school, and work situations required for daily living in a given society. The same largely applies to the hundreds of students who are awarded scholarships to English-speaking and non-Arabic speaking countries every year to study for their First Degree. These students learn English in their respective foundation programs, despite spending 9 years receiving formal instruction in English at their different schools throughout the Sultanate (Al-Issa 2009b, 2010a).

Hence, the government decided to revolutionize ELT over a decade ago to meet the present and future challenges and demands of the local and global market. This has been materialized in the form of introducing the Basic Education System (BES) in 1999, which introduces English language from Grade 1, stresses Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and incorporates educational technology within ELT and the other subjects on the national curriculum. This has come at the expense of the former General Education System (GES), which completely phased out in June 2010 across the Sultanate.

1 Rationale

Barkhuizen and Gough (1996) stress that "the success of language-in-education policy is measured by the effectiveness of its implementation" (p. 461). This article attempts to investigate the perceptions of the first BES graduates about the implementation of the system, any perceived changes in their language, and the implications this can have to ELT in the neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCCC)—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi

Arabia & the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)—the Middle East and North Africa countries and other "expanding circle countries" (Kachru 1986), which might be embarking on ELT reform projects endeavours.

In addition, there has been scarcity of written and published research on the different aspects of ELT policy and planning in Sultanate of Oman. The authors of this article hope to make some significant contribution to this important, but overlooked area.

The writers of this article further hope to communicate the results of this study to the stakeholders at the Ministry of Education to help them understand the factors disturbing the implementation of ELT reform in Oman. By doing so, the stakeholders will be in a good situation to point to the source(s) of the problem and act accordingly. Discussion of the literature on ELT in the subsequent sections will help to provide practical solutions to the current ELT policy implementation problems in the Omani ELT system.

2 Educational reform

Educational reform is intellectually, physically and financially demanding and challenging and driven by political, cultural, economic and ideological reasons. Effective educational reform, according to Oliver (1996), must involve the establishment of new targets, strategies and stake holders.

2.1 Public education

Oman, a young nation-state and an oil-producing country in the Gulf, established a national mass education policy and invested heavily in education over the past 40 years or so through formal schooling and successfully improved the level, quantity and quality of human capital. As a result, literacy rates of males and females have increased significantly over the four decades. Education has been free for all since His Majesty the Sultan came to power on 23rd July 1970. This has contributed to reducing literacy rates significantly.

According to the data retrieved from the Ministry of Education database in 2010, the number of schools rose from three schools of about 900 students in 1970 to 207 schools and about 55,752 students in 1975/1976 and to 953 schools and 488,797 students in 1995. However, schools then were equipped with chalk and blackboards and basic furniture (chairs and desks, ceiling fans and lights). Classrooms were barrack-like (35–50 students in each classroom) and schools were equipped with libraries that included some printed materials. Schools operated according to two shifts—morning 7:30–11:30, and afternoon 12:00–4:00. Textbooks and other relevant educational printed materials were mainly imported. Formal tests dominated the assessment scene.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education trained a number of inspectors during the 1970s. These inspectors visited the different schools throughout the Sultanate on a regular basis and reported their observations to a central authority at the Ministry. Such reports had an important impact on the career paths of the inspected academic and administrative staff.

In addition, expatriate teachers outnumbered their Omani counterparts. However, some of these teachers lacked proper academic and educational qualifications and training, and hence would travel all the way from their respective regions (sometimes for up to 400 km) to attend in-service training sessions in Muscat. The case was not very different with regard to the Omani teachers, who too lacked proper training and qualification, as many of them were graduates of the Teacher Training Institutes (TTI), which were opened in 1977, and transformed into Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges (ITTC) in 1984, and eventually transformed into

Colleges of Education in 1995. The difference between the three institutions is substantial and lies in the academic and administrative structure and quality and quantity of types of knowledge presented to the prospective teachers.

Oman has witnessed seven 5-year educational plans starting since 1976–1980, which attempted to achieve a balance between quality and quantity. Today, the number of schools throughout the Sultanate has exceeded 1,050 and the number of students has exceeded 560,000, out of which only less of one quarter of this number find seats in the (free) public higher education institutes available throughout the country.

A large number of schools throughout the Sultanate have been equipped with a resource centre, which include computers with access to the Internet, LCD projectors, slides projectors, OHPs, printers, scanners, videos, video cameras, digital cameras, different computer software, and a wide range of printed and educational materials.

Moreover, textbooks and other pertinent printed materials are produced in-house. Classrooms, which have become relatively smaller in size, are equipped with a whiteboard and markers and are air-conditioned, as the temperature in summer (May–August) sometimes exceeds 50°C.

In addition, Omani teachers have gradually started to outnumber their expatriate counterparts in most disciplines, especially in the female sector. Furthermore, teachers who have graduated from the TTI and ITTC were enrolled in special programs to help them upgrade their skills and knowledge about their respective fields. Also, teachers have been attending different in-service training programs in their respective regions and senior/master teachers have been appointed to assist the less experienced, new arrivals to the system and fresh graduates in developing to become better teachers. These senior/master teachers are trained to do action research and keep portfolios. Moreover, experienced and qualified Omani teacher trainers have been appointed in the different regions of the Sultanate.

In 1998–1999, the Ministry of Education introduced the BES as an "ambitious" scientific and pedagogic education development project, which consists of 10 years of schooling and covers substantial changes in areas such as the school system, curriculum content, textbook development, means of assessment and teacher training.

This is followed by the introduction of the Post-Basic or Secondary Education, which lasts for 2 years of schooling (Grades 11 and 12), and is designed to continue developing basic skills like proper communication skills, problem solving skills, use of mathematics skills, personal and social skills, and information technology literacy. These skills are important for employment and career planning and are set to be achieved through adopting student-centred learning, internationally recognized curriculum and assessment standards based on learner outcomes and authentic assessment of student performance, problem-solving teaching approach, development of individual differences, and development of employability skills and universal competencies (Ministry of Education 2008).

An example of the curriculum reform adopted is offering a host of optional courses for student to choose from such as English Language Skills, Graphic Design, Economic Geography, Artistic Skills, Computer Business, Computer science, Geography and Modern Technology, Musical Skills, Physical Education and some others, from where each student should choose three. Another example is asking all students to study research methodology and complete a project during the 2 years of the Post-Basic Education (Ministry of Education 2008).

The Ministry of Education further allocated the Best Teacher Award some years back to honour distinguished individual teachers from all public schools across the Sultanate, provided they satisfy a certain set of criteria. For example, 250–300 teachers representing different schools and subjects were declared recipients of the award from across the country in 2010 and honoured with a Certificate and a Laptop.

Certain criteria such as a minimum of 4 years teaching experience, adherence to rules and regulations, punctuality and attendance, professional efficiency, skill and competence in using computers, professional innovation and creativity, effort made to pursue professional development, students' attainment and ability to cope with pressure have been specified to help determine the best teacher.

2.2 Public Higher Education

Pollock (2007) acknowledges that the GCCC have started to diversify their economies to relinquish dependency on oil revenues, as industry in the region is demanding increasingly skilled labour to meet human resource needs. Oman, more specifically, and according to Gonzalez et al. (2008) "... is dealing with a less than certain economic future because its oil reserves ... are quickly being depleted" (p. 147).

Hence, the Omani government has made substantial efforts to diversify higher education to produce citizens that can contribute to a knowledge-based and diverse economy in order to meet the requirements and challenges of higher education, the local labour market and globalization. One important achievement has been the opening of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the only public university in the country, which at present consists of nine colleges, has nine research centres, and includes 15,000 students enrolled in the different Bachelors, Master and Ph.D. programs. English is the medium of instruction in the science-based colleges and some humanities-based courses like Translation, English Language Literature, ELT and Commercial Law, for example.

Furthermore, seven Higher Colleges of Technology have been opened throughout the Sultanate offering a Bachelors degree in different technology-based programs like surveying, networking, oil and gas, human resources, data bases, etc.

There are also further 16 institutes for health sciences throughout Oman, which offer different programs in health-related disciplines such as physiotherapy, medical records, laboratory sciences, nutrition, general nursing, etc.

There is further one campus for the College of Banking and Financial Studies in Muscat, which offers a Bachelors degree if programs related to banking and finance such as Accounting, Banking, Business, Computing, and Insurance.

Moreover, in 2005–2006 five out of the six Colleges of Education were converted to Colleges of Applied Sciences and started to offer four major programs: Communication Studies, Information Technology, Design and International Business Administration. English is once again the medium of instruction in all the aforementioned colleges and institutes.

In addition, the Ministry of Higher Education offers over 100 fully and partially-sponsored scholarships available annually for students to read for their Bachelors, Master and Ph.D. degrees mainly in the English-speaking countries in disciplines not on offer in the existing functioning colleges and universities in the Sultanate. Many of these students, especially at the undergraduate level, require a language improvement component prior to embarking on their respective academic program. The cost of these English courses (tuition fees) ranges from US\$ 5,000–10,000 per calendar year. There are also additional fees paid by the government to the students on these scholarships. These include living, airfare tickets, books and clothes. Each student in each of the English-speaking country costs the Omani government approximately between US\$ 23,000–27,000 per academic year.

As part of the electronic Oman government initiative, applications for higher education—public and private—places have been merged under one unified online system—Higher Education Admissions Centre. Each higher education institute publishes the minimum entry requirement for each of its degrees and the student selects his or her choices in order of

preference. When the Ministry of Education publishes Grade 12 results in mid July, these results are fed automatically into the system and offers are made in early August.

Oman Accreditation Council (OAC) was also established recently to monitor and supervise accreditation and quality control of higher education institutes in Oman. It is thus noteworthy that based upon international literature and international benchmarks, OAC decided in 2007 that students enrolling in any of the aforementioned institutes are required to attend a General Foundation Program (GFP) as a compulsory entrance qualification for Omani degree programmes for one 6–12 months in which they study English Language, Maths, Computing and General Study Skills as these four areas provide a comprehensive intellectual base relevant to all further study, and to the development of broad thinking and life skills in general.

However, a student is exempted from undertaking a component of a GFP if s/he has already met the required learning outcomes for that area of learning. If a student satisfies the standards for English (an IELTS score of at least 5.0 with none of the four areas of writing, speaking, listening and reading below 4.5, or a TOEFL score of at least 500), math and computing during entry testing then s/he will be awarded the certificate of attainment for the entire GFP.

It is noteworthy that almost 1,900 students out of 2,700 students accepted at SQU in 2010–2011 were required to join the GFP English Language component due to failing to pass the Exit test administered by the Language Centre at SQU. The exit test is equivalent to 5.0 on IELTS.

2.3 Private education

In 1972–1973, there were only two private schools with 115 students. Today, the number of schools grew to over 150 private schools with over 30,000 students. All private schools teach English from Kindergarten 1 and Science and Maths in English. All these schools use imported materials. There is a kind of reliance on the private schools to provide more advanced education services, as in the case of teaching English using imported materials and teaching Math and Science through English from Grade One. Besides, private schools in Oman enjoy greater autonomy than the public schools.

2.4 Private higher education

It is interesting to note that Qatar and the U.A.E., which have imported and invited high quality universities to establish branch campuses as an innovative solution to the problem of providing an internationally competitive education without having to build local capacity from scratch (Pollock 2007). However, Oman has witnessed the opening of seven private universities and 19 colleges since 1995 with a student enrolment exceeding 33,000 in all colleges. These colleges and universities are affiliated with internationally-recognized academic institutions in the English-speaking countries and offer mostly science-based programs like Medicine, Engineering and Applied Sciences, which are all taught in English.

2.5 Educational reform implications

According to the World Bank development report released in 2008 on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, there is a gap between what the MENA educational systems currently produce and the needs to achieve their development objectives. The quality of education in the Arab World, according to Maroun et al. (2008), is falling behind other regions like Asia and Latin America, for example, and needs urgent reform to tackle the unemployment "crisis", which this part of the world is experiencing (Al-Dhafiry 2003), and

which is higher than other areas in the world. Unemployment, according to Maroun et al. (2008), is driven on the one hand by lack of skills, which are directly associated with the infrastructure of the education system, and low wages and low motivation, which are directly related to the socioeconomic environment on the other hand.

Al-Dhafiry (2003) and Al-Suwaidi (2010) are critical of the educational strategies implemented by the GCCC governments, which they describe as "background" and a "failure" respectively and do not meet the job market requirements. Al-Dhafiry (2003) criticizes the performance and efficiency of schools in the GCCC. Al-Suwaidi argues that globalization requires college and university graduates to possess skills. Al-Suwaidi acknowledges that 70% of the jobs available in the GCCC market at present are dominated by expatriate labour force and that US$ 50 billion is earned by the Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan) labour force annually as a result of occupying jobs which should be filled by the GCCC citizens. Al-Dhafiry (2003) and Al-Suwaidi (2010) stress that the result of lack of such harmony between the graduates and the job market requirements has lead to unemployment, which has its negative implications for the social structure of the GCCC. Al-Suwaidi concludes his talk by blaming the GCCC governments for failing to develop a strategy and vision to link education with the job market.

The World Bank development report (2008) acknowledges that high levels of investment in education in the MENA countries have failed to positively affect economic growth. Low quality education is one reason why the relationship between education and growth is weak. According to the Education For All Global Monitoring Report released by the UNESCO (2009), Oman was ranked 82 out of 125 countries in terms of the education development index, indicating that the country's education investment did not translate into the desired outcome. Education in Oman, as it is the case in all the MENA countries, is centralized with the government being the sole responsible agency for making policies, financing and delivering all the services, including curricula and syllabi design, materials and textbook production and initial and in-service teachers training and employment.

Education in the MENA has been criticized for focusing more on delivering and memorizing facts, repetition of definitions, passive reception of knowledge, acquisition of declarative knowledge at the expense of procedural knowledge, textbook dependency, didactic, adoption of teacher-centeredness, while has given less attention to individual differences in the classroom, interactive learning, student-centeredness, and introduction and development of higher-order cognitive skills. This is believed to have its negative implications for productivity and rapid economic growth, as low productivity leads to low returns.

Akkari (2004) thus argues that the MENA countries are at a crossroads in their educational development and that they need to reform their education as "today's students must be taught the technical skills that are needed to function effectively in tomorrow's world" (p. 151). To Akkari, "technical skills", refer to problem solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity and cooperation, which he claims contribute to democracy and citizenship building.

Furthermore, unemployment rates are high amongst Grade 12 graduates. Gonzalez et al. (2008) attribute this to "lack of skills and competencies necessary for productive work" (p. 165). One of these necessary skills and competencies is English language. While the majority of Omanis are clustered in the public sector, as it offers social status, permanent employment and higher wages than the private sector (World Bank 2008), the private sector, which the government has lately stressed the significant role it can play in the country's economy and human capital development, demands special skills such as English, which is possessed by well-qualified and experienced expatriate labour force. Expatriate labour force was thus estimated at 750,000, according to the 2010 census, as opposed to around 600,000 in 2003. These expatriates come from Arab and non-Arab countries, with the latter category

being dominant. The expatriate labour force in Oman come from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, U.S.A., Turkey and some Western and Easters European countries like U.K., Italy, Germany, France and Holland. Comparatively, the number of Omanis is estimated at two million in 2010, as opposed to about 1.6 million in 2003.

As far as the private sector is concerned, the World Bank development report (2008) considers it as an important source through which public schools can be directed to set partnerships with and hence diversify revenues. This, according to the development report, will give schools more autonomy and accountability and delegate "… more responsibilities to schools to mobilize and manage the inputs necessary to address local circumstances and changing demand for education services" (p. 290), as this is the general trend at present throughout the world, especially with the reluctance shown by MENA countries to establish fees for public education.

The World Bank development report (2008) is critical of the fact that the MENA countries have invested in information and communication technology through the provision of computers and other sophisticated educational technology, while felling short on training teachers to use this service. Teachers, according to the development report, should be considered at the centre of the education system. Teachers are expected in the educational trends to continuously evaluate their learners learning needs and adopt and adapt appropriate methods accordingly, rather than merely deliver knowledge and skills. Teachers can work collaboratively or individually to improve the quality of their schools' outcomes and upgrade their skills and competencies to be accredited and promoted via school grants. This guarantees turning teachers into professionals, rather than continue to be functioning as "… factory workers along a production chain, delivering a range of skills and knowledge to a homogenous group of students" (p. 291).

The World Bank development report (2008) further states that the MENA countries have placed greater emphasis on "engineering" education—"… providing the necessary level and mix of inputs to achieve the objectives of education by means of effective management and adequate resources" (p. 134), while paid scant attention to "public accountability"—"… giving parents and students voice to influence educational policies and resource allocation" (p. 134), and incentives to teachers.

Teachers in the MENA countries thus receive low salaries and get promoted on the basis of seniority rather than performance. Omani teachers holding a Bachelors degree thus receive in the region of US$ 1,350 when first appointed as full-time teachers at public schools, while the non-Omanis earn a few hundred dollars less than their Omani counterparts. While once this amount was just sufficient to secure a decent standard of living, things have drastically changed after the recent world economic crisis and the sudden rise in prices a few years back.

Besides, teachers in Oman have a minimum workload of 20 periods per week in addition to other administrative and technical responsibilities. In some schools where there is a shortage of teachers, existing teachers are assigned up to 28 periods per week. In fact, teaching in general is not considered a socially prestigious career in Oman especially amongst males.

The World Bank development report (2008) is additionally critical of the fact that the educational systems in the MENA countries adopt a "command-and-control" education management structure to establish, expand and maintain schools, training centres, and universities. The Report suggests that the MENA countries need to make a shift from "command and control" to "coordinate and evaluate" management style to ensure diversification of resources and quality control, as organization of education systems all over the world is changing on pedagogical, structural, financing and managerial fronts to keep pace with the changing place of human capital in the development equation.

Maroun et al. (2008) suggest that involving relevant stakeholders like the business community, labour department, development bodies and local groups, for example, in a dialogue about strategy formulation, which entails education infrastructure, ensures establishing a clear connection between socioeconomic themes and education objectives. However, integral to success in planning any education strategy, according to Maroun et al. (2008), is a continuous transparent objective assessment of the situation to help acknowledge and address any obstacles and gaps leading to achieving the defined goals in the system.

3 English language teaching in general education system

Different types of research were conducted about ELT through the GES in Oman over the past four decades or so and different conclusions were reached about the different theoretical and practical shortcomings that ELT in Oman suffered from.

3.1 Teachers

One of the very important shortcomings was associated mainly with the teachers' performance and their delivery methods and techniques inside the classroom due to their multiple and conflicting cultural and training backgrounds (Al-Issa 2002, 2006b, 2009b, 2010a). Oman is insufficient in terms of national teachers of English. This is particularly the case in the males sector who prefer other jobs to teaching in general and ELT in particular for various reasons. According to statistics released by the Ministry of Education in 2008/2009, almost 40% of public school male and female teachers in the Sultanate are non-Omanis. They mainly come from Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Al-Abri (2003) acknowledges the unsatisfactory recruitment and selection of expatriate English teachers in Omani public schools and considers it as an impediment to ELT development in the Sultanate.

However, more and more Omani teachers are joining the teaching force every year. This is important as Omani teachers understand the philosophy behind ELT in their local context more than their non-Omani counterparts do and share the same cultural background and values with the students (Nunan et al. 1987), which should have positive implications for their students' learning, and hence policy implementation.

Different non-Omani teachers were found to teach English through the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Approach (Al-Issa 2002), give product an edge over process (Al-Kalbani 2004; Al-Shabibi 2004), and emphasize rote learning at the expense of analysis and thinking (Al-Balushi 1999). Other teachers were found to follow "safe" teaching routines through total adherence to the prescribed steps in the teacher's guide due to various deficiencies in their English language and methodology training (Al-Issa 2002).

As far as Omani teachers are concerned, the vast majority of them are graduates of SQU and they were found to be linguistically and methodologically inadequate (Al-Issa 2005a). The latter weakness is more associated with their inadequate training as reflective practitioners (Al-Issa 2005c, 2008; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi 2010).

Low (1999) thus reports on theorizing and implementing a program for teaching foreign languages in primary schools in Scotland in 1989. Low argues that there was a problem of adequate supply of linguistically competent teachers. In a scenario similar to Oman, even when teachers were trained and introduced into the system, the shortage of trained teachers within the same school emerged. There is emphasis laid on the teacher's language competence here and is believed to be fundamental for ensuring program and policy implementation success.

Furthermore, Johnson (1992) examined the instructional actions and decisions of six pre-service ESL teachers during their initial teaching experience. The six teachers were enrolled in a practicum as part of a 2-year Masters Degree program in TESOL. While four of the teachers were native speakers of English, the other two possessed native-like fluency in English. Three of the teachers had no previous teaching experience, while the other three had less than two years teaching experience in EFL in their native countries. Johnson found that all of these teachers paid more attention to teaching than to learning. These teachers failed to show any sensitivity towards their learners' needs and levels. This has been mainly attributed to their lack of practical knowledge and experience, which Johnson blames the second language initial teacher training programs for failing to provide.

3.2 Syllabus

The rigidity of the syllabuses and their lack of flexibility, variety, and challenge were reported as an additional obstacle to the students' target language improvement (Al-Alawi 1994; Al-Toubi 1998; Al-Hammami 1999; Al-Issa 2007a). According to Al-Issa (2009b, 2010a), while the first two syllabuses *(English for the Arab World and English For Oman)* gave the English-speaking countries' cultures an edge over the local culture, the third syllabus*(Our World Through English)* (OWTE) took a contrary path to the first two. While the first two books were written and produced in England by Longman, OWTE was written and produced locally. Prior to the piloting and introduction of OWTE, questionnaires about the content of the book were sent to some English language inspectors and teachers, students, and parents to find out their opinions and ideas. However, OWTE was found to concentrate on teaching certain skills more than others (Al-Issa 2006a).

3.3 Assessment

Al-Toubi (1998) and Al-Issa (2005b) criticize the assessment system in ELT in the Sultanate for overlooking the importance of evaluating performance, while at the same time training students to heavily focus on and work towards mastering content and achieving high grades through copying and memorization, which has had negative implications for teachers' and students' motivation and performance. The means of assessment implemented by the Ministry of Education then were found to be giving memorization an edge over thinking (Al-Issa 2002). Exams were almost entirely based upon the national textbooks and focused on non-critical or lower-thinking skills, which fail to tests the students' abilities to analyze, synthesize, infer, discuss, evaluate, and argue for and against (Al-Issa 2009b, 2010b). Al-Toubi (1998) found that one of the reasons behind the poor level in English of the Omani students is the exam-based system, which has negative implications for the students' language development and attitudes about the multiple uses and values of English language.

As a result, many teachers used to train their students for exam purposes, which further encouraged decompartmentalizing and disintegrating the target language and memorizing it in lexical and grammatical chunks (Al-Issa 2005b, 2009b, 2010a,b), and independent of any meaningful context (Al-Issa 2002). This is a distinct characteristic of the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Approach and the roles teachers play within these two heavily criticized methods (Al-Issa 2002, 2006b).

This situation thus affected the students' attitudes and gave them the impression that English is more of a "subject" than an important international language and a language of wider communication with multiple local and global uses and values (Al-Issa 2005b, 2009a,b, 2010a,b). It has further steered many students in the direction of hiring teachers to give them

private lessons at home. Such lessons centre round training the students to answer and tackle the final exam questions. Teachers training for exam purposes have been found lacking "self-esteem" and "insensitive" to their students' needs and more satisfied with the appearances of learning than with what and how their student are learning (Al-Issa 2009c).

Dove (1986) stresses that exams influence the way teachers interpret the curriculum in any educational system, which has negative implications for teachers' professionalism. Thus, different male teachers—males are usually the bread-winners in MENA—of English and other subjects like Arabic Language, Biology, Chemistry, Maths, and Physics give private tutorials in Oman to children whose parents can afford the fees in order to prepare the students specifically for the exam. The fees can reach as high as US$25 per student per hour. Teachers giving these kinds of lessons, and those teaching at public schools too, usually use past exam papers to train the students to answer the end-of-semester exam questions.

According to Assaad and Elbadawy (2006), cited in the World Bank Development Report (2008), private tutoring seems to be the product of three factors.

> First, the system restricts entrance to higher education through a one-time examination. Because the exam score is critical for a student's career path and future earnings, families are willing to invest in tutoring as a form of intergenerational wealth transfer. Second, the growth in school-age population has undermined the quality of education reflected in a very high class density and poor classroom teaching quality. This has intensified competition for seats in the general secondary stream and in universities and increased the demand for private tutoring. Finally, teachers' salaries are very low. This creates a strong incentive to make more income through private tutoring, which can earn them on average 10 times their governmental salary (p. 190).

Thus, Shata et al. (2001) conducted a survey about private lessons in the U.A.E.—another GCCC and one of the Oman's closest neighbouring countries, which shares numerous educational, cultural, social, political and economic characteristics with the Sultanate. The three reporters interviewed teachers, students, parents, researchers, school heads, institute principals, educational training centres officers, university lecturers, religious preachers, intellectuals and officials from the Ministry of Education. The three reporters received variable answers amongst which was blaming the exam-oriented system.

Shata et al. concluded that private lessons was a bad phenomenon and should be treated. They believe that an ideal treatment would be a careful scrutiny of the needs, interests and motivations of the students and to establish effective communication between parents and the Ministry of Education. The three writers advocate the important role of parents in policy making.

Buckland (2011) reports on the drift between policy and practice in language-in-education policy in South Africa. She critically discusses the weaknesses in the policy and lack of formal training provision for teachers, which has inevitably led to disturbances in policy implementation.

3.4 Resources

Many schools throughout the country lacked important educational technological aids, which have been found in the literature to play an integral role in second language acquisition (Al-Issa 2002). Non-technological aids and other printed materials were also missing from different schools (Al-Issa 2002).

Moreover, class size was an important issue in the pre-BES system. Classrooms were packed with a minimum of 35 students, which impeded their participation and acquisition of

the target language (Al-Issa 2002). It also encouraged a teacher-led setting in the classroom since the teachers cannot pay sufficient attention to the big numbers of students they have.

3.5 Time

English used to be taught from Class 4 until class 12. This was found insufficient and a factor which had a direct negative bearing on the students' target language acquisition (Al-Issa 2002). Lightbown (2000) stresses that "the most important reason for incomplete acquisition in foreign language classroom settings is probably the lack of time available for contact with the language" (p. 449). Al-Toubi (1998) is critical of the insufficient time allocated to ELT on the national curriculum and considers it as an impediment to English language development.

It is noteworthy that in 2006 the Ministry of Education hired Jane Moates—an English language consultant – to submit a consultancy report about an English curriculum framework for Grades 11 and 12 and to advise the ELCD at the Ministry of Education on the development of EFM. She met with key staff from the Ministry of Education, visited some BES schools in Muscat – the capital – and outside Muscat to observe classes, to investigate language resource centres (LRCs), and talk to teachers and students. Moates further reviewed EFM Grades Five to 10, key documentation pertinent to the curriculum and its implementation within a new and changing model of Post-Basic Education, and the new curriculum assessment guidelines.

Moates (2006) and Nunan et al. (1987) report that the Omani school year is short and that students are over-assessed. They emphasize that this has negative implications for English language acquisition and learning..

4 English Language Teaching in Basic Education System

The World Bank released a Development Report (World Bank 1997) in which it acknowledged that the most secure and valuable investment any nation could make is investment in education, as it is an investment for the future survival and sustainable development of the society. Accordingly, Oman has regarded the reform of education as an investment and decided to adopt the BES mainly to promote the efficiency of education in light of the challenges and requirements of this era and Oman's aspirations for the future; and to link theoretical and practical aspects of education (Al-Farsi 2002).

According to Al-Issa (2002), the BES is concerned with the integration of theory, practice, thought, work, education, and life. The main objective of the BES is to promote quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of the educational system in order to produce outcomes of an international standard (Al-Farsi 2002). This is considered to be achieved mainly through introducing English language at Grade 1 to encourage its more efficient usage, updating teaching methods, updating the assessment and evaluation system, decreasing emphasis on theoretical concepts in education and increasing emphasis on practical applications, reducing class size to ensure the provision of more care and guidance to students, and provision of in-service training opportunities for teachers and other personnel involved in the project (Al-Farsi 2002).

Huge budgets have been thus allocated to the theorization and implementation of teaching English through the BES through arranging national and international conferences, forums, seminars, symposiums and workshops and equipping schools with state-of-the-art educational technology equipment. Also, different foreign experts, advisors, and writers were invited and recruited to evaluate and report on and write materials and provide technical advice about the different aspects of this national reform project.

4.1 Time

The BES is divided into three "cycles"—the first cycle is from Grade One to Grade Four, the second cycle is from Grade Five to Grade Ten, and the last cycle is called the "Post-Basic" cycle and is concerned with Grades 11 and 12. A major characteristic of this plan has been to introduce English from Grade One as opposed to introducing it from Grade Four in the GES, so as to create more time for language contact and acquisition.

An important characteristic of ELT reform in the region (GCCC) has been giving ELT more time on the national curriculum as it is the case in Saudi Arabia after 9/11 through introducing it into primary schools. Kuwait and Jordan decided to start teaching English from Grade One right after the Second Gulf War (Zughoul 2003).

4.2 Resources

Another aim behind the adoption of the BES is to help learners acquire technological competence through the use and application of a variety of technological means for effective communication and solving problems related to their daily lives (English Language Curriculum Framework 1999). Schools throughout the country are being equipped with resource centres, which include state-of-the-art educational technological aids with an aim to help students to acquire as much a wide range of knowledge and information via English language as possible.

In the U.A.E., the Ministry of Education thus decided to integrate computers and the Internet in ELT system, as this is known to be the era of information technology and Globalization or as Zughoul (2003) labels it "Americanization". This kind of reform is sought to promote learner-centered education, communicative and practical use of the target language, proficiency-based language learning and acquisition approach, integration of the four skills, linking English language instruction with other pertinent disciplines, fostering intellectual functions such as critical, reflective and analytical thinking, for example, and presenting content in a flexible and eclectic manner (Kim 1997).

However, Al-Mekhlafi (2004) found that despite the availability of computers and the Internet at schools throughout the U.A.E., use of such facility is controlled and restricted to administrative purposes, the existing syllabus does not allow for integrating the Internet in the EFL classroom and almost 80% of the teachers lack training in computer and Internet searching skills, which has direct and serious negative implications to serving the curriculum objectives and making any important critical decisions about their teaching and their students' learning.

Ismaiel et al. (2010) thus investigated the perceptions of 621 Arabic and English teachers from 67 schools about the use of technology in their classes in the U.A.E. schools. They found that both teachers regarded the importance of incentives for successful technology integration. "Incentives" considered critical for successful technology integration in teaching have been free or discounted computers, positive evaluations, release time or salary increment. Teachers in this study also highlighted lack of appropriate training workshops and lack of personal guidance and consultancy as barriers to technology integration.

The three writers recommend conducting workshops for both categories of teachers to improve their technology integration skills. They further recommend rewarding teachers who integrate technology in their classes, as this can have its positive implications for encouraging more teachers to use technology to promote language teaching and learning, which on the long run can influence positive language education policy implementation.

However, most of the non-Omani teachers, who still form almost 50% of the total teaching manpower across the Sultanate and whom the vast majority are found in the males' schools,

are not familiar with using educational technology, as educational technology is not incorporated in their ELT systems. Others, on the other hand, are advocates of teaching through the chalk-and-talk approach, due to the beliefs they hold about ELT and the way they were taught English (Al-Issa 2009b,c, 2010a). Such teachers play an integral role in disturbing the implementation of BES.

Moates (2006) reports on the lack of different resources—books, dictionaries, CD ROMs, video machines and access to the Internet—in the LRCs for English teachers to use with their students in the schools she had visited. She emphasizes that this hinders assigning projects to students and can have negative implications for students' language development.

4.3 Syllabus

A further major characteristic of the BES is the writing of a new textbook *English For Me* (EFM), which has gradually replaced OWTE, and which is based on a needs analysis. The Ministry of Education recruited different British commercial writers with variable degrees of experience to write EFM for Grade One to Grade Seven. However, the Ministry assigned two regional British teacher trainers to write the textbook for Grade 8 to Grade 10. The Ministry decided to assign writing the books for Grades 11 and 12 to Omani authors. It appointed a team of Omani officials from the English Language Curriculum Department (ELCD) to check and report on the content of each of the textbooks prior to its introduction.

Although this reform is still in progress, some researchers explored the opinions of different public and private sector institutions, experts, administrators, parents, and students about ELT in Oman. Issan (2002) stresses that the full participation of all those affected by the change in curriculum development and evaluation is significant and leads to success and long and short-term improvement. The themes and topics included in the book primarily represent the choices of the students. Throughout the entire textbook series, EFM is ". . . based round a communicative and skills-based methodology and encourages active pupil participation and collaboration, rather than a teacher fronted and dominated classroom methodology" (English Language Curriculum Framework 1999, p. 11).

Moreover, according to the English Language Curriculum Framework (1999), EFM introduces English language in appealing topics to the learners and directly related to the current affairs. Good examples are using sophisticated telecommunication, talking about the weather and discussing likes and dislikes. By the end of Grade 10, students are expected to be equipped with over 6,000 receptive and productive words. This is supposed to prepare them for their after school studies. Grammar is further taught inductively and deductively in EFM with an aim to maintain the right balance between the two approaches.

Furthermore, the world today has become a small village and English has become the most widely used means of communication through which the inhabitants of this global village are communicating and interacting (Al-Issa 2005d, 2009b, 2010a). All four skills are thus given equal attention in EFM. English is considered as an international language whereby it becomes fundamental to help expand the learners' understanding of the world and diverse world cultures (English Language Curriculum Framework 1999).

Barkhuizen (1998) investigated high school learners' perceptions of language teaching/learning activities in South Africa. Despite the fact that the South African syllabus introduces the idea of teaching English for communicative purposes, teachers continued teaching in the traditional manner and presumably in the way they themselves were taught English at school. Barkhuizen also attributes this to the lack of training the teachers have had in

CLT. Apparently, the students resisted CLT-oriented activities, and believed that traditional and mechanical ELT classroom work taught them better English and made them learn more language.

4.4 Assessment

Tests and other assessment tools focus on the goals the materials try to achieve rather than the content of the course materials themselves. In other words, "assessment procedures must reflect and support a communicative and skill-based orientation to teaching and learning" (Curriculum Framework 1999, p. 11).

However, Moates (2006) found that there is a conflict between the BES objectives and the new implemented assessment system, which has negative implications for policy implementation.

4.5 Teacher training and development

All eight regional supervisors (previously known as inspectors) and teacher trainers from across the Sultanate attend a three-day orientation program at the English Language Curriculum Department (ELCD) in Muscat at the introduction of each book of the EFM series. They then return to their respective regions and conduct in-service sessions to their respective teachers. It is the responsibility of the respective supervisors and teacher trainers to identify their teachers' different weaknesses and needs during the orientation and teaching stages of teaching EFM. The respective supervisors and trainers try to help their teachers with their problems. They further report these problems and needs to the ELCD to take them into consideration during the textbook revision stage.

However, Al-Rasbiah (2006) is critical of the ELT in-service sessions held by the Ministry of Education and stresses that such sessions have failed to meet the teachers' needs, lacked new content and hardly paid any attention to the teachers' daily problems.

Teachers are further encouraged to keep reflective notes and journals and to visit their peers at school and in the neighbouring schools to help them gradually develop into effective reflective practitioners, who effectively, systematically, and critically reflect on their teaching, their students' learning, and the surrounding ELT context. The last one is influential and complex and involves processes and outcomes and cultural, political, and social variables (Boud et al. 1985). The Ministry of Education has equipped regional libraries with relevant literature about ELT to help them stay abreast of the developments in ELT and conduct research.

In addition, a head teacher or a head of ELT Department—usually experienced and Omani—has been appointed at each school to act as a mentor. S/he would visit the new teachers and those with less experience during teaching the new syllabus and help them tackle any difficulties and overcome any problems related to using the new materials. These head teachers are trained to conduct action research and keep portfolios.

In 1998, the Ministry of Education signed US$ 25 million contract with University of Leeds in U.K. to design & conduct a 3-year in-service B.A. program for 1016 ITTC graduates. The course materials, handouts, & reference books were provided by University of Leeds. However, the program lacked a language improvement, research methods & assignment writing modules. Many of these teachers exited ITTCs on Band 5 on IELTS and thus found the program too difficult to cope with. Consequently, some teachers refrained from attending, while others failed to continue partly due to the linguistically and technically demanding nature of the program.

5 ELT teachers as reform agents

In their theory of contemporary educational policy, Taylor et al. (1997) argue that policy documents are texts which have been constructed in a particular context. Ball (1994) argues that policies as texts are "… cannibalized products of multiple influences and agendas" (p. 16). Because policies are crude and simple statements, as Ball (1994) argues, they tend to be treated differently by the different social groups and actors involved at the implementation stage. Language policies are important, authoritative and powerful guidelines for practices, they are processes and products (Ball 1994; Taylor et al. 1997), but they are not equally perceived as such by all social groups and actors involved in the realm of education. Within the context of this study, the ELT policy in Oman is resisted, challenged, changed, ignored, and manipulated by the different agents involved in the ELT system; on the top which come the teachers. Holliday (1992) argues that teachers have their own real world, hidden agendas, philosophies and culture, which affect curriculum development and implementation. Within the same vein, Woodrow (1991) stresses the active role of teachers in the process of changes and implementation of new ideas, as their beliefs and attitudes may support or impede the success of any educational reform.

As far as ELT reform is concerned, Al-Mekhlafi (2007) emphasizes the central role of competent teachers in any educational policy reform endeavour in facing the changes and challenges of the 21st century, fulfilling the expectations of the society and meeting the demands of the current information era through providing students with effective EFL instruction to help them survive in an economically competitive world.

Teachers are thus the most powerful and sole interpreters of the curriculum and the philosophy of the syllabus inside the classroom (Dove 1986; Baldauf 1990). Baldauf (1990) considers the teachers' professionalism as fundamental for any language education plan interpretation and places teachers at the heart of the language education process.

Coffield et al. (2007) report on the introduction of Teaching and Learning Research Program project at Further Education in U.K., which ELT was a fundamental part of. The authors acknowledge that the speed and burden of (technological and bureaucratic) change in the new policy were "intense", which subsequently affected material distribution and the appointment of new staff. Coffield et al. found that teachers were overburdened by a heavy teaching load, marking, preparation and administrative tasks. However, the seven authors also found that teachers who loved teaching, felt deeply committed to their students and had the will and desire to exercise their most cherished professional values and traditions, still felt there was space for professional judgement in how they taught, irrespective of "… the constraints of the curriculum, the requirements of awarding bodies, meeting targets, and passing inspection" (p. 732).

However, Al-Shabibi (2004) found that teachers' practices in an ELT writing class in Oman are powerfully driven by their beliefs, which steer them to teach writing through grammatical drilling and accuracy. Al-Shabibi attributes the adoption of this approach to teaching writing to the way these teachers were taught. Al-Rasbiah (2006) is thus critical of the teaching methodology implemented by teachers in Oman and suggests that teachers in Oman need training in communicative English, teaching writing and reading.

In fact, Moates (2006) reports that SQU graduates encountered difficulties dealing with EFM after they had graduate and joined the teaching force due to their poor methodology training. Moates blames SQU for failing to include appropriate and up-to-date learner-centred methodology in its teacher training programs.

In addition, Moates (2006) found that some teachers are facing difficulties understanding the language used in Grade Eight and Nine materials. Moates attributes this to the inadequate language level of some Omani teachers educated inland and abroad, which is below the First

Certificate of English (FCE) or Band 6 on the IELTS and which has negative implications for significantly raising the students' level and the implementation of EFM.

6 Research questions

In light of the aforementioned discussion about the BES and GES, the following questions can be asked:

1. What are the attitudes of the students who have exited the BES about the teachers and curriculum?
2. Is there any statistically significant difference between the males and females' perceptions in terms of the BES teachers and curriculum?
3. Is there any statistical difference in the students' perceptions between the BES and GES in relation to their English language teachers' activities and curriculum characteristics?
4. What is the role of the teachers in the BES implementation?

7 Methodology

7.1 Subjects

The targeted population of the study is the BES graduates of the academic year 2009/2010. According to the statistics obtained from the Ministry of Education, 4,500 students graduated from the BES that year as opposed to 40,000 students who finished the GES at the same year. All of these students usually diverge in many higher educational institutions throughout the country and abroad. Some of them might not even qualify for acceptance in any and end up joining available secondary-satisfied type of career. This article only focuses on the BES graduates who were accepted at SQU in that academic year. These students come from all over the country and are enrolled in various colleges at the university. Their aggregated/final Grade 12 grades range from 78.6 to 93.8%.

Since they come from various areas of the country, the educational and socioeconomic status vary to a great extent. Some of them come from urban areas where facilities/contacts with English are more available (e.g. language teaching centres, malls, multi-ethnic people, etc.) compared to others who come from rural areas with the only contact with English is in the English classroom. Even with the latter, the amount of English is dramatically modest. These aspects are acknowledged as extraneous factors in learning English but cannot be accounted for in this study. It only focuses on the attitudes of 2009/2010 intake of SQU from the BES students coming from these different backgrounds.

The actual number of students who took part in this study is 141 students; 89 are females and the rest (i.e., 52) is males. Their ages ranged from 18–20-years old. Statistically SQU does not keep a record of the number of GES or BES students specifically, as it does not differentiate between them during enrolment. However, in many mixed-gender majors at the university male students represent the third only and females make up the rest of the whole population, which is reflected approximately in the population of this study as well. Since this is their first year at SQU, these students are one of two types. The first type has students who have passed the English language placement test and the exit test of the language centre. They would start their credit courses immediately as their English language is of the adequate level required. The second type is made of students who could not pass the placement test and were accordingly placed at one of the

six intensive English language levels. They would have to achieve Level Six and pass the exit test prior to embarking on their credit courses at their respective colleges. The current study is not interested in any of these types particularly; neither their majors at the university. The main focus was on all the BES graduates who joined SQU in the academic year 2009/2010 and their perceptions about their English language during their BES education.

7.2 Instrument

In order to obtain the perceptions of these students, a five-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 64 items distributed among three categories (teacher = 24 items, curriculum = 27 items, and student = items) was initially developed. In order to narrow down the focus of this article, the last category was eliminated. As a result, the two-category questionnaire focused on the teacher and curriculum with 24 items and 27 items respectively (see Appendix Table 12). The items originated from the relevant literature focusing on language-in-education planning and policy in Sultanate of Oman (Al-Issa 2002, 2006c).

In order to check the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to a "panel of judges" (de Vaus 1996, p. 57), five ELT specialists from SQU, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education. The questionnaire, the rationale behind the study and the research questions were provided to the judges. They were asked to identify the relevance of each item to the study's purpose. Most of the items achieved a high degree of acceptance by the judges. However, few duplicated items were spotted and others were reworded for accuracy. The panel also suggested adding a slot for an additional statement by the respondents at the end of each category. The final version of the questionnaire includes 49 statements (see Appendix Table 12) in which the teacher's category has 21 statements and the curriculum encompassed 28 items.

7.3 Procedures

Once the questionnaire's final draft was ready incorporating the amendments based on the judges' suggestions, it was important to decide how to administer the questionnaire to our targeted population. After checking the numbers with the authorities, it was found that the current academic year intake at Sultan Qaboos University was 2,860. It was not possible to verify how many of them came from BES, as it was not requested in the SQU admission forms. Therefore, the researchers decided to email the questionnaire to all the students and head the questionnaire with brief general demographic information which required each responder to specify if s/he graduated from a BES or GES school. Only 141 students out of 252 students who completed the online questionnaire indicated that they came from a BES background. The non-BES students were hence all excluded from the study.

Since it was decided to send the questionnaire to all current academic year's intake (2,860 students), it was more convenient to administer it electronically. Therefore, the questionnaire was designed online using the Google's Forms. It was also tested for clarity and ease of responding with a couple of students from the same intake who did not take part in the sample. The questionnaire's online link was then emailed to the entire cohort. Collecting the data from this sample spanned over three months with five reminders at different intervals. Once the allotted period for data collection was over, the subjects' responses were downloaded for analysis from the automatically saved Excel file.

7.4 Analysis

A quantitative descriptive data analysis approach was used. Since the responses of the respondents are automatically logged online, Google Docs does not only save the data in an output excel file but it is also capable of conducting simple frequency-based descriptive analysis coupled with the percentages of each item. In order to check these frequencies, the original raw data file was analyzed in SPSS independently and the percentages quoted in the results were found to be identical to Google's analysis. The data was also analyzed quantitatively using the SPSS program in order to answer the research question that asks about the differences between males and females in terms of the BES teachers and curriculum and the questions asking about differences in the perceptions between the BES and GES in relation to their teachers and curriculum.

The two-sample (independent groups) *t* test was used with these two questions because we are evaluating differences between means of two independent groups: males and females in terms of the BES teachers and curriculum in the first question, and the BES and GES perceptions about teachers and curriculum in the second. The test aims to determine whether the means of the two groups in each question are different from each other based on the independent samples. The *t* test was also used with these two questions since we are comparing independent samples (i.e., randomly selected from the population), normal distribution is assumed in the sample, and the population variances can be considered to be equal. The findings below will highlight the salient results obtained.

8 Results and findings

A t-test was carried out in order to analyze the participants' responses. The results are reported below in numbers and means. They are also grouped under six main clusters. The following is a discussion of those clusters. For percentages see Appendix Table 12.

8.1 Time

The response of the participants (Table 1) to this item remarkably show the highest statistical mean (3.50), which indicates that the participants feel they are receiving sufficient exposure to and contact with English.

8.2 Resources

This cluster (items 22, 23 and 28) seeks information pertinent to the resources available in the participants' schools. It obtains a high statistical score (3.0), which indicates that the majority of resource centres and libraries found at the schools are equipped with the necessary technological aids and printed materials, which can have broad positive implications for ELT in BES.

Table 1 Time in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	S.D.
27	The number of weekly periods was enough for learning English.	141	3.50	1.467

Table 2 Resources in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	SD
22	My school resource centre was equipped with educational technological aids like computers, printers, projectors, videos, and CD ROMs	141	3.93	1.257
23	My school library was equipped with different English materials, references, texts, and computer software	141	3.24	1.247
28	There were more than 35 students in the classroom	141	2.04	1.429
	Total score		3.0	1.311

The importance of educational technology in general and computers in specific in ELT for second/foreign language acquisition and learning has been highlighted by several authors (Al-Kahtani 1999; Davies and Pearse 2000; Sebiah 2001; Warschauer and Kern 2000; Keane 2002; Savignon 2002; Wiburg and Butler-Pascoe 2002; Kiam 2003; Velazquez-Torres 2006; Al-Mamari 2007; Ismaiel et al. 2010). In addition, Thadphoothon and Jones (2004) found that educational technology and computers in ELT have a significant role to play in enhancing collaborative learning and critical and reflective thinking. Gunduz (2005) stresses that a computer is an important tool for assisting language learning and that its importance includes supplementing practice of the four skills, facilitating learning via discovery and interaction, promoting collaborative work and student-centeredness, enhancing second/foreign language fluency and accuracy, and developing knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Reigeluth and Garfinkle (1992) emphasize that computers are "… excellent tools for maximizing active involvement and construction of learning" (p. 21). Al-Mamari (2007) found that that use of computers positively impact upon students' confidence, motivation and interest.

Item 28 is associated with the number of students in each classroom. Number of classrooms is considered an aspect of the resources available in the school. The ratio of students per classroom is likely to be higher if a school consists of few classrooms. This item obtained a comparatively low statistical score (2.04), which indicates that some schools have crowded classrooms. Al-Toubi (1998) found that large and mixed-ability classes hinder second language interactive activity design. According to Sparrow et al. (2000), large classes lead to problems related to lack of interaction, feedback, and motivation and partly poor learning outcome. Chism (1989) further outlines a number of disadvantages of large classes like causing impersonal relations between the teacher and his/her students, limit the range of instructional activities, problems related to classroom management as such classes are crowded and more noisy, problems associated with rewarding (Table 2).

8.3 Assessment

Items 29, 30 and 31 deal with whether the exam questions were based upon the textbook, too many exams and quizzes were given to the students throughout the academic year, and whether the students were required to memorize lexical and structural items for their exams respectively. While item 29 obtains a low mean (1.82), the other two items (30 and 31) obtain a high mean (3.55 and 3.30), respectively, which indicates that exams still dominate the assessment scene in the Omani ELT system and can affect the teachers' performance. Teach-

Table 3 Assessment in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	SD
29	The questions in the exams we took were based on the textbook content	141	1.82	1.023
30	We had many exams & quizzes throughout each academic year	141	3.55	1.306
31	The exam questions required memorization	141	3.30	1.230
	Total score		2.89	1.186

ers in such contexts find themselves inclined to narrow the scope of the language presented to their students via teaching and training them for exam purposes. In other words, teachers become more concerned about helping their students to achieve high marks than acquire the language through multiple sources and different approaches, methods and techniques.

An exam-dominated context can also negatively impact upon students' motivation, attitudes and perceptions and subsequently steer them in the direction of considering English as a fact-based subjects, which requires memorization.

On the other hand, it is encouraging to see that the exam questions are no longer based upon the topics found in the prescribed textbook, which helps the students understand that the mandated textbook is not the sole source of acquiring such an international language like English. In addition, answering questions without prior preparation trains students to think on their feet and be able to draw on their knowledge about the language and world and think beyond the textbook language to answer any questions they are confronted with. These are characteristics of progressive education in general and a language education system in particular. In general, this cluster obtains a high statistical mean (2.89) (Table 3).

8.4 Syllabus

This cluster (items 24, 25, 26, 32–48) seeks information related to the national syllabus—FM. It obtains a high statistical mean (3.02), which indicates that the majority of the participants are satisfied with the current syllabus, which contains different authentic and communicative writing tasks such as writing topics of their choice, and writing letters, essays, reports, commentaries, articles, stories, picture and event description, poems, and reading stories, articles, reports and letters, which cater for the students' future vocational, social and academic needs.

Moreover, it is encouraging to see item 32 obtaining a comparatively low mean, which indicates that the textbook does not encourage the students to copy, as it does not ask them to transcribe its content.

It is further encouraging to see item 25 obtaining a high mean (3.23), which indicates that the topics in EFM have been selected carefully and the needs of the students in this regard have been largely met. Doyle (1979) thus considers pupils as significant and influential socializing agents, as they indeed have variable proficiency language levels, diverse motives, needs and reasons for learning foreign languages and come from multiple cultural, economic, educational and social backgrounds, which makes teaching such languages particularly challenging (Curtain and Pesola 1994; Tedick and Walker 1996; Sifakis and Sougari 2003). This is particularly the case in an age where the world is described as a "global village" and where English language is a powerfully dominant international and global communicative force, and where teachers, according to Sifakis and Sougari (2003), should be dynamic professionals, open-minded practitioners and informed decision makers in terms of material selection and

Table 4 Syllabus in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	SD
24	The textbooks we were taught were easy.	141	2.88	1.323
25	The topics in the textbooks we were taught were interesting.	141	3.23	1.356
26	The textbooks we were taught concentrated on teaching certain language skills more than others.	141	3.03	1.042
32	We were asked to transcribe what is in the textbook.	141	1.99	1.007
33	We were required to write in various topics of our choice.	141	3.31	1.288
34	We were required to write letters in English	141	3.92	1.128
35	We were required to write essays in English	141	3.90	1.197
36	We were required to write reports in English	141	3.18	1.307
37	We were required to write commentaries in English	141	3.18	1.334
38	We were required to write articles in English	141	3.38	1.392
39	We were required to write stories in English	141	3.55	1.328
40	We were required to write descriptions of pictures in English	141	4.00	1.105
41	We were required to write description of events in English	141	3.80	1.154
42	We were required to write dialogues in English	141	3.45	1.344
43	We were required to write poems in English	141	2.06	1.184
44	We were required to read stories in English	141	3.53	1.285
45	We were required to read poems in English	141	2.38	1.274
46	We were required to read articles form newspapers and magazines in English	141	3.44	1.278
47	We were required to read reports in English	141	2.94	1.314
48	We were required to read letters in English	141	3.29	1.344
	Total score		3.02	1.249

design, which can have positive implications for their students' motivation, interests, needs, abilities and levels.

However, the analysis shows that items 42 and 45, which deal with writing poems and reading poems, obtain a comparatively low statistical mean—2.06 and 2.36, respectively. This indicates that EFM has failed to take poetry on board as an important language genre that contributes to the development of the learner's target language. Collie and Slater (1987) contend that poetry is a very important aspect of literature due to its significant contribution to language enrichment. Bassnett and Grundy (1993) and Ghosen (2002) consider poetry as a profound source of second/foreign language acquisition and knowledge development, as it helps integrate the four language skills. Ghosen (2002) further emphasizes the powerful role of poetry as a fundamental tool for critical thinking. Al-Issa (2005d) acknowledges the value of poetry as a tool that contributes to students' motivation development towards second/foreign language learning.

EFM has also failed to introduce challenging tasks and activities and strike a balance between teaching the four skills. This appears evident in the high mean items 24 and 26 obtain respectively (2.88 and 3.03). Challenging task and activities help student to focus on, understand, analyze and critically think about the tasks or activities assigned to them. Such tasks or activities further direct the students to perceive and appreciate the relevance and significance of English as a very important tool for achieving multiple genuinely communicative purposes like the ones discussed in the introductory part of this study. Achieve-

ment of such purposes thus requires activating and drawing on all four skills equally, which is the contemporary view of language teaching and language learning and development (Table 4).

8.5 Traditional Teaching

This cluster (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 19), which obtains a high statistical mean (3.25), seeks information about the different practices the respective respondents' teachers have adopted teaching English in a what can be classified as "traditional". These are teachers explaining English vocabulary and grammar rules in Arabic, asking students to memorize lexical items and structural rules, confining students' exposure to the textbook language, training students for exam purposes and asking students to transcribe what they write on the board. While item 7 (my teachers used to ask us to memorize English grammar rules) obtains a comparatively low mean (2.16), the remaining six items obtain a high mean. This is an indication of the choices and decisions many teachers are making respecting methods, which subsequently encourage decompartmentalizing English and dealing with it as if it is a fact-based subject, which requires memorization.

   Harmer (2007) stresses that teachers should never forget their commitment to creating an English language environment in the classroom "… where English is heard and used as much of the time as possible" (p. 39). Teachers are further a significant source of the target language comprehensible input to their students in the Arab World, and Arab students consider them as models and examples of the target language (Al-Issa 2002).

   A further important indication to the low mean in this cluster is the teachers-centered role played by the teachers and the transmission-based approach of knowledge implemented by the teachers. This marginalizes the role of the students as dynamic and active constructors of knowledge and deprives them from any thinking space. By contrast, it encourages students to copy and consider the teacher as the sole source of knowledge.

   An additional indication of the high mean in this cluster is the way exams are considered by teachers as a prime yardstick for achievement and progress in learning the target language. This is evident in the high statistical mean item 12 obtains (3.99), which deals with teachers training their students for the exams.

   Furthermore, the choices and decisions made by a large number of teachers in this cluster is a possible indication of the beliefs and images they have constructed during their school years as students, training and teaching about the most efficient ways of teaching English, and which have persisted over the years (Al-Issa 2002) (Table 5).

Table 5 Traditional Teaching in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	SD
4	My teachers explained English vocabulary to us in Arabic.	141	3.84	1.100
5	My teachers explained English grammar rules to us in Arabic.	141	3.26	1.204
6	My teachers used to ask us to memorize English vocabulary.	141	2.77	1.256
7	My teachers used to ask us to memorize English grammar rules.	141	2.16	1.112
8	My teachers taught us the language of the textbook only.	141	2.84	1.397
12	My teachers trained us for the exams.	141	3.99	1.230
19	My Teachers asked us to transcribe what they wrote on the board.	141	3.04	1.247
	Total Score		3.12	1.220

It is important, therefore, that such teachers are trained *properly* to confront their language learning, training and teaching images and beliefs through "systematic" and "critical" reflection (Hall 1997) and attempt to locate ELT within wider social, political and cultural contexts, which according to Boud (1999), influence teachers, students, learning outcomes and learning activities to ". . . reach deeper levels of learning and develop an ability to evaluate and/or judge the value of the existing ELT context from those three perspectives, which leads them to make decisions about the necessity of change in action" (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi 2010, p. 42).

8.6 Communicative teaching

Compared to the previous cluster about the traditional practices teachers implement to teach English, this cluster, which deals with communicative teaching practices the respective participants' teachers have adopted, obtains higher statistical mean (3.40).

This cluster includes items about using educational and technological aids, teaching English through English, complementing the mandated textbook, assigning challenging activities and homework to the students, using different interesting teaching techniques and methods, asking students to do different language assignments and projects, engaging students in pair and group work activities, asking students to participate in different extra-curricular activities at their respective schools and being taught by Omani teachers during their 12 school years.

Table 6 Communicative teaching in BES

No.	Item	N	Mean	SD
1	My teachers used educational technological aids (computers, videos, OHPs, etc.) to teach us English	141	2.75	1.465
2	My teachers used educational aids (e.g. pictures, posters, realia, etc.) during their teaching	141	3.42	1.321
3	My teachers used only English language to teach us English	141	3.40	1.341
9	My teachers used additional materials & texts to teach us English	141	3.25	1.425
10	My teachers used to give us challenging exercises and activities to make us think	141	3.26	1.426
11	My teachers used to give us challenging homework to make us think	141	2.99	1.296
13	My teachers used different and interesting techniques and methods to teach us English	141	3.26	1.328
14	My teachers used to give us different activities that required pair and group work to help us practice our English	141	3.91	1.256
15	My teachers asked us to do different language presentations in English	141	3.77	1.472
16	My teachers asked us to do tasks and assignments in English	141	3.48	1.245
17	My teachers asked us to do different language projects in English	141	3.89	1.138
18	My teachers asked us to participate in different extra-curricular activities such as the school radio & writing wall magazines in English	141	3.37	1.370
20	Omani teachers taught me English over the past 12 years	141	3.48	1.500
	Total Score		3.40	1.352

The responses of the participants are a confirmation of being taught by teachers who implement practices contrary to what was found in the previous cluster. Teachers here are varying the sources of exposure to the language and allowing the students multiple opportunities to practice their English and use it for communicative and interactive purposes.

Teachers are further helping their students to use the target language as a tool for performing activities and tasks and thinking about and constructing relevant, interesting and challenging knowledge.

Moreover, responses of the participants in this cluster indicate the different and important roles the participants' teachers play inside the classroom, which not only affect the students' language learning and acquisition, but also positively influence their attitudes about the importance of learning the target language and the variable strategies available at their disposal.

It is interesting to see that item 20 obtains a high statistical mean (3.48), as it was argued earlier that non-Omani teachers have been found teaching English through the Audio-Lingual Approach and Grammar Translation Methods. Hence, it is imperative that the Ministry of Education pays more attention to attracting Omani more male teachers to join the teaching force to gradually replace the expatriate counterparts, as Omani teachers understand the local ELT philosophy better, which has positive implications for policy implementation.

By contrast, item 1 obtains a comparatively low mean (2.75), which is an indication of either a lack or absence of the educational technological aids at some of the participants' respective schools, or the failure of the teachers to use such facilities for various reason associated with time constraints, teachers' lack of familiarity with sophisticated educational technology, teachers' training and cultural backgrounds, and teachers' hidden agendas, perceptions and philosophies about ELT.

The Ministry of Education is, therefore, responsible for equipping all schools with the adequate educational technology and training all teachers to use it effectively to ensure successful policy implementation, as technology can give learners increased freedom to explore individual interests and allow different students to learn different things within a cooperative social structure (Collins 1991). Technology is, therefore, an increasingly powerful force in the lives of learners. It has the power to place learners in control of their own learning and to promote active learning (Table 6).

9 Discussion of results

In order to answer the teacher-related part of the second research question, an independent sample test was conducted to find if there is any statistical difference between the males and females' perceptions in relation to their teachers in the BES. As shown in Tables 7 and 8 below, there is a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of males and females about their teachers of the BES in favour of the females. In other words, the female learners find that their BES English language teachers have helped them acquire the relevant language skills and strategies.

Table 7 Teachers group statistics

Group statistics					
	Gender	*N*	Mean	SD	Std. error mean
Teacher	M	52	2.9481	.51544	.07148
	F	89	3.5225	.50812	.05386

Table 8 Teachers independent sample test

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t Test for equality of means					95% Confidence interval of the difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (two-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Teacher Equal variances assumed	.523	.471	−6.442	139	.000	−.57439	.08916	−.75068	−.39811

This has its implications for choices made about the quality and quantity of in-service training programs offered, the procedures and mechanisms adopted for the implementation of the so programs, and the knowledge and skills male teachers bring to the ELT classroom. Stakeholders at the Ministry of Education need to revise their teacher selection criteria and perhaps the content, structure, design and implementation procedures of the in-service training programs offered to the new male teacher recruits to make them meet their professional needs and offer solutions to their daily classroom-based problems, as suggested by Al-Rasbiah (2006).

In order to answer the curriculum-related part of the third research question, an independent sample test was conducted to figure out if there is any statistical difference between the males and females' perceptions respecting the BES curriculum. As it is shown in Tables 9 and 10 below, a statistical difference has been found between the perceptions of the males and females about the BES curriculum in favour of the females. In other words, female learners find that the English language curriculum has helped them acquire the relevant skills and strategies.

As the table shows, there is a significant difference in the scores for the perceptions about the curriculum for males ($M = 3.0288$, SD $= 1.09102$) and the perceptions about curriculum for females ($M = 3.9101$, SD $= 1.07016$) conditions; $t(139) = -4.684$, $p = 0.000$).

The results suggest that according to the students' perceptions there was a significant difference between the males and females perceptions regarding the contribution of the curriculum in their learning in favour of females.

It was argued above that teachers are the sole interpreters of the syllabus and powerful agents of policy implementation. Thus, male teachers do not appear to be teaching communicatively due to possible deficiencies in their language adequacy (Low 1999; Moates 2006). Alternatively, they could be training their students for exams due to certain perceptions and conceptions they hold about the system (Dove 1986; Holliday 1992) that directly or indirectly affect their performance. Such teachers could also be experiencing difficulties understanding the underlying philosophy underlying the new curriculum due to their (multiple and conflicting) training and cultural backgrounds, and teaching the way they were taught, as suggested by Al-Shabibi (2004).

The third research question asks if there are any statistically significant differences between the perceptions of the BES and GES students in relation to their teachers' activities and curriculum's characteristics. In order to answer this question, an independent sample two-way t test was conducted to compare the perceptions about teacher's activities and curriculum characteristics with the BES and GES students. The table below shows the results.

As Table 11 shows, there was no significant difference in the scores for the perceptions about teachers ($M = 0.152$, SD $= 0.073$) and the perceptions about curriculum (M $= 0.156$, SD $= 0.077$) conditions; $t(253) = 1.438$, $p = 0.152$).

Table 9 Curriculum group statistics

Group statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Curriculum	M	52	3.0288	1.09102	.15130
	F	89	3.9101	1.07016	.11344

Table 10 Curriculum independent sample test

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t Test for equality of means					95% Confidence interval of the difference	
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Curriculum Equal variances assumed	.012	.913	−4.684	139	.000	−.88127	.18814	−1.2532	−.50929

Table 11 BES and GES students independent samples test

		Levene's test for equality of variances		*t* test for equality of means					95% Confidence interval of the difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	Lower	Upper
Teachers_mean	Equal variances assumed	.265	.607	1.438	253	.152	.10598	.07370	−.03916	.25112
	Equal variances not assumed			1.432	238.086	.153	.10598	.07399	−.03978	.25174
Curriculum_mean	Equal variances assumed	.342	.559	1.423	253	.156	.11069	.07779	−.04250	.26388
	Equal variances not assumed			1.433	247.556	.153	.11069	.07725	−.04146	.26284

The results suggest that according to the students' perceptions there was no significant difference between the BES and GES in relation to their English language teachers' activities and curriculum characteristics.

This is an indication that policies are "crude" and subject to misinterpretation (Ball 1994) and that ELT reform in Oman has changed in theory, but has been largely otherwise in practice, and that disparity between theory and practice still exists and persists. Teachers' role is central in policy implementation and bringing about positive change to the system (Baldauf 1990; Woodrow 1991), or otherwise, as earlier shown by Barkhuizen (1998) and Buckland (2011). Hence, one can argue that despite the significant changes the Ministry of Education has made to the syllabus and the in-service teacher training and development programs, change has failed to materialize for reasons most likely associated with the teachers' experience, practical knowledge (Johnson 1992), and overall professional competence (Al-Mekhlafi 2007), which raises question marks about teacher selection and training.

10 Conclusion

This article aimed at investigating the attitudes of the first cohort exiting the BES about the teachers and the BES curriculum. A total of 141 first year SQU students responded to the online questionnaire, which consisted of 49 items.

The results have shown that the graduates of the BES think that part of the teachers have been disturbing the implementation of the BES through failing to use educational technological aids in teaching, teaching English through Arabic, encouraging memorization of language lexical and grammatical items, encouraging copying, asking students to memorize lexical and structural items, confining teaching the language to the textbook and training students for exam purposes.

Thus, the results of this study, which largely echo the findings of Al-Issa (2002) study, have revealed that such teachers possibly lack familiarity with the new teaching methods due to lack of training. One can argue that adequately trained teachers have a significant role to play in overcoming certain curriculum-related problems such as mixed-ability classrooms and easy textbooks.

However, one can also argue that the motivation for not implementing the policy may well be found in external factors such as the teachers supplementing their incomes by privately tutoring students in after-hours sessions, which are largely exams-driven. The new BES policy may profoundly disturb these long standing arrangements and thus teachers resist them. There is a dearth in the literature about private tutoring in ELT in the Developing World in general and the Arab World in specific. A detailed investigation will allow for better understanding of the reasons underlying this phenomenon.

On the contrary, it can be argued that Omani female teachers, who constitute over 90% of the ELT female teaching force in the Sultanate, are contributing more effectively to policy implementation than their male counterparts. One can reach this conclusion through the significant difference that was found in favour of the females. The statistical significant difference found between the perceptions of males and females about their teachers of BES in favour of the females indicates that the female English language teachers have contributed to their learners' learning more than what the males have. Hence, there is an urgent and pressing need to Omanize the ELT male sector.

There is also a need to conduct empirical research to allow for better understanding of why different Omani male teachers are not accepting ELT as a career. While low salaries, lack of incentives, receiving promotions on the basis of seniority rather than performance, the hard

nature of teaching as a profession and lack of teaching social prestige were discussed above as possible contributing reasons to preventing teachers in general from turning into professionals to meet the existing complex and challenging demands of education, other unknown social or technical reasons might unveil.

In a final note, the findings of this study have their implications for ELT theory and practice in the GCCC especially that the majority of these countries have recently incorporated educational technology into their ELT systems, started teaching English from Grade One and introduced new materials, methodologies and approaches to their respective ELT systems. Issues like poor nationalization of male English teachers, spread of private tuitions, and poorly trained expatriate teachers exist in all GCCC, which have their negative implications for English language implementation policy and national economy development. Hence, these six countries can benefit from collaborating and cooperating with each other to discuss methods of researching and overcoming such problems, just as they have been doing with other relevant aspects like for example politics, the military and security (Al-Issa 2011).

Appendix: basic education system questionnaire

Table 12 Basic education system questionnaire

Basic Education System Questionnaire

Region:	_____	Welayah (city):	_____
School:	☐Public ☐Private	Mark in English:	_____
Gender:	☐Male ☐Female		_____
	Graduated from:	General	_____
	A. A Basic Education School	percentage:	
	B. A General Education School		

		Statement	5	4	3	2	1
Teachers	1.	My teachers used educational technological aids (computers, videos, OHPs, etc.) to teach us English	16.3%	21.3%	10.6%	24.8%	27%
	2.	My teachers used educational aids (e.g. pictures, posters, realia, etc.) during their teaching	22%	37.6%	13.5%	14.2%	12.8%
	3.	My teachers used only English language to teach us English	26.2%	28.4%	14.2%	21.3%	9.9%
	4.	My teachers explained English vocabulary to us in Arabic	30.5%	41.1%	14.2%	9.9%	4.3%
	5.	My teachers explained English grammar rules to us in Arabic	14.9%	31.9%	28.4%	13.5%	11.3%
	6.	My teachers used to ask us to memorize English vocabulary	9.2%	22.7%	23.4%	25.5%	19.1%
	7.	My teachers used to ask us to memorize English grammar rules	2.1%	13.5%	17.7%	31.9%	34.8%
	8.	My teachers taught us the language of the textbook only	17.7%	16.3%	18.4%	27%	20.6%
	9.	My teachers used additional materials & texts to teach us English	26.2%	29.1%	15.6%	12.1%	17%
	10.	My teachers used to give us challenging exercises and activities to make us think	24.1%	27.7%	14.9%	16.3%	17%
	11.	My teachers used to give us challenging homework to make us think	12.1%	29.1%	22.7%	18.4%	17.7%
	12.	My teachers trained us for the exams	45.4%	29.8%	9.9%	7.8%	7.1%

Table 12 continued

		Statement	5	4	3	2	1
	13.	My teachers used different and interesting techniques and methods to teach us English	18.4%	33.3%	18.4%	14.9%	14.9%
	14.	My teachers used to give us different activities that required pair and group work to help us practice our English	42.6%	30.5%	10.6%	8.5%	7.8%
	15.	My teachers asked us to do different language presentations in English	47.5%	19.1%	9.2%	10.6%	13.5%
	16.	My teachers asked us to do tasks and assignments in English	34%	39.7%	14.9%	4.3%	7.1%
	17.	My teachers asked us to do different language projects in English	25.5%	27%	25.5%	13.5%	8.5%
	18.	My teachers asked us to participate in different extra-curricular activities such as the school radio & writing wall magazines in English	24.1%	31.9%	14.9%	14.9%	14.2%
	19.	My Teachers asked us to transcribe what they wrote on the board	14.2%	22.7%	30.5%	18.4%	14.2%
	20.	Omani teachers taught me English over the past 12 years	39%	14.2%	17.7%	13.5%	8.5%
	21.	Additional comments:					
Curriculum	22.	My school resource centre was equipped with educational technological aids like computers, printers, projectors, videos, and CD ROMs	44%	28.4%	12.1%	7.8%	7.8%
	23.	My school library was equipped with different English materials, references, texts, and computer software	17.7%	28.4%	24.8%	29.1%	10.6%
	24.	The textbooks we were taught were easy	13.5%	20.6%	27%	18.4%	20.6%
	25.	The topics in the textbooks we were taught were interesting	21.3%	26.2%	22.7%	14.2%	15.6%
	26.	The textbooks we were taught concentrated on teaching certain language skills more than others	9.2%	19.9%	43.3%	19.9%	7.8%
	27.	The number of weekly periods was enough for learning English	33.3%	28.4%	9.9%	12.1%	16.3%
	28.	There were more than 35 students in the classroom	12.1%	7.8&	7.8%	17%	55.3%
	29.	The questions in the exams we took were based on the textbook content	2.1%	6.4&	12.8%	29.1%	49.6%
	30.	We had many exams & quizzes throughout each academic year	29.1%	29.8%	17.7%	13.5%	9.9%
	31.	The exam questions required memorization	16.3%	39.8%	23.4%	14.2%	11.3%
	32.	We were asked to transcribe what is in the textbook	2.1%	6.4%	17.7%	35.5%	38.3%
	33.	We were required to write in various topics of our choice	20.6%	29.8%	21.3%	17%	11.3%
	34.	We were required to write letters in English	39.6%	36.2%	14.2%	7.8%	5%
	35.	We were required to write essays in English	37.6%	36.2%	12.8%	5.7%	7.8%
	36.	We were required to write reports in English	17%	29.1%	24.8%	13.5%	15.6%
	37.	We were required to write commentaries in English	18.4%	28.4%	22%	15.6%	19.2%
	38.	We were required to write articles in English	26.2%	29.8%	14.2%	15.6%	19.2%

Table 12 continued

	Statement	5	4	3	2	1
39.	We were required to write stories in English	29.1%	30.5%	18.4%	9.9%	12.1%
40.	We were required to write descriptions of pictures in English	39%	39%	11.3%	5%	5.7%
41.	We were required to write description of events in English	31.9%	36.9%	16.3%	9.2%	5.7%
42.	We were required to write dialogues in English	27%	29.1%	19.1%	12.1%	12.8%
43.	We were required to write poems in English	2.1%	13.5%	19.9%	17.7%	46.8%
44.	We were required to read stories in English	26.2%	33.3%	18.4%	11.3%	10.6%
45.	We were required to read poems in English	5.7%	17.7%	19.9%	22.7%	34%
46.	We were required to read articles form newspapers and magazines in English	20.6%	39%	16.3%	12.1%	12.1%
47.	We were required to read reports in English	12.8%	25.5%	24.1%	18.4%	19.9%
48.	We were required to read letters in English	20.6%	31.2%	19.1%	29.1%	14.2%
49.	Additional comments:					

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