

The Cultural and Economic Politics of English Language Teaching in Sultanate of Oman

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Bio Data

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Abstract

English language teaching (ELT) has been an important global activity and a large business and industry for the past five decades or so. This has been concurrent with the international role English language has been playing on the world arena in the postcolonial/neocolonial age dominated by USA. This paper, hence, triangulates data from different official texts and the pertinent literature. Its aim is to discuss three foci of the cultural and economic politics of ELT with a special reference to the Sultanate of Oman and to delineate the powerful ideological impact underlying them. These foci are 1) English in Oman, 2) ELT within the Omani education system, and 3) ELT outside the Omani education system. The discussion leads to the conclusion that Oman, as a developing Third World Arab country with a shortage in human and physical resources, is culturally and educationally dependant on North America (USA and Canada), Britain and Australia (NABA) for its progress and development.

ELT as a Profit-Making Activity

A very important aspect of the politics and economics of English today is ELT (Phillipson, 1990; Bourne, 1996). ELT has become a global activity and to a large extent a business and industry, which can be dated to the 1950s (Dua, 1994; Pennycook, 1994). English and ELT within this context has become a valuable commodity for export and a profit-making multinational industry in the hands of the West (Al-Issa, 2002).

The spread of English played a key role in the expansion of the cultural, economic and political influence of Britain and USA or the “Center” (Kachru, 1986) in less developed countries or the “Periphery” (Kachru, 1986), especially in *government and education* (Phillipson, 1992). According to Phillipson (1992), the high status of English in these two interrelated sectors perpetuates the dependency of the Periphery countries on the powerful Center countries and interests. The less developed countries are the consumers of the expertise, methodology and materials dispensed by the West, which, according to Canagarajah (1999), promote Western ideologies and contribute to its domination more subtly. While the role of the UK was implicit in promoting English as a second language so as to protect and promote capital interests, the American role, which started in the postwar era, had identical aims and was as explicit (Dua, 1994), and as significant as the British role. Phillipson (1990) writes that “ELT was seen as a means towards political and economic goals, a means of securing ties of all kinds with the Third World Countries” (1990, p. 128). Dua (1994) writes that the USA looks at the promotion of English “... as one of its objectives of cultural policy” (p. 10). English, therefore, was

seen as a fundamental component of American and British foreign policy. Pennycook (1994) writes that

... In some way, it might be said that the English language class may be less about the spread of English than about the spread of certain forms of culture and knowledge ... through the very practices of English language teaching (pp. 178-179).

Central to this paper is the argument made by Dua (1994) that developing countries are also responsible for the expansion of English and ELT through depending on the UK and the USA for financial assistance and planning expertise and the failure to take any independent decisions related to language planning. This unequal relationship with the developed nations (NABA) is claimed to have forced the developing nations to accept cultural and educational dependency as part of their existence and reality (Dua, 1994). This illustrates that the ideological and hegemonic control and expansion of English language and ELT in the postcolonial/neocolonial period are reflected within a neocolonial contextual perspectives.

This is thus particularly true as English is considered the language of technology and science (Al-Haq & Smadi, 1996, Al-Issa, 2002; Zughoul, 2003), business, banking, industry and commerce, transportation, tourism, international diplomacy, advertising (Enyedi & Medgyes, 1996; Zughoul, 2003), communication (Stevens, 1992; Fonzari, 1999; Pakir, 1999; Hasman, 2000; Zughoul, 2003), telecommunication, mass communication and the Internet (Stevens, 1992; Graddol, 1997; Pakir, 1999; Zughoul, 2003). The vast majority of the scientific and social fields stated above are dominated at present by the world's only superpower – USA.

ELT Products

Dua (1994) and Pennycook (1994) argue that the economic gains of ELT are represented in the role the British Council played as a dynamic organization in spreading ELT and selling and marketing ELT to the world. The British Council Annual Report (1968-69) states that “there is a hidden sales element in every English teacher, book, magazine, film-strip and television programme sent overseas” (pp. 10-11). The British Council linked its important role in facilitating ELT in the Third World to the contribution the USA can also make in this regard (Bourne, 1996). The Chairman of the British Council stated in his Annual Report 1983-84:

Our language is our greatest asset, greater than North Sea Oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remains highly sought after. I am glad to say that those who guide the fortunes of this country share my conviction in the need to invest in, and exploit to the full, this invisible, God-given asset (quoted in Phillipson, 1992, p. 144-145).

The vocabulary used here – “asset”, “supply”, “monopoly”, “brand”, “fortunes”, “invest” and “exploit” are of economic orientation and are a reflection of a politicoeconomic ideology production. The spread of ELT worldwide has been thus through the sale and marketing of the various and numerous textbooks, computer software and readers published with regard to ELT. Pennycook (1994) provides extensive statistics about the British and American economic profits from ELT.

Native English Speaker Teachers

Another important aspect of the cultural and economic politics of ELT is the native English speaker teacher (NEST), who forms an integral part of the industrialization of ELT (Pennycook, 1994) and is considered as a source that increases the revenues of UK and USA (Al-Issa, 2002). Widdowson (1992) acknowledges that NESTs make better informants, but not necessarily better instructors. Curtain and Dahlberg (2000) describe the hiring of NESTs as a better choice than a teacher who has learned the language as a second language as a “misconception”. Also, Bebawi (2000) writes that “the ideal ESL/EFL teacher is not necessarily a native speaker” (in text online). He states that most studies agree that ‘nativeness’ is not included in the identified qualities of a credible teacher.

Phillipson (1996) uses the phrase “the native speaker fallacy” to refer to unfair treatment of qualified non-native English speaker teachers. The term was coined as a reaction to the tenet created in 1961 Commonwealth Conference in Makerere-Uganda, which stated that the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker. Maum (2002), however, describes the Makerere tenet as “flawed” and writes that “people do not become qualified to teach English merely because it is their mother tongue”. Kramsch (1997) argues that native speakership is neither a privilege of birth nor of education, but “acceptance by the group that created the distinction between native and non-native speakers” (p. 363). Canagarajah (1999) writes that the native speaker fallacy “monopolizes the ESL teaching jobs in the Periphery” (p. 82). Kachru (1992), furthermore, states that it is a fallacy to believe that native speakers of English, whether

teachers, academic administrators and material developers "... provide a serious input in the global teaching of English, in policy formulation, and in determining the channels for the spread of the language" (p. 359). Canagarajah (1999) considers the situation in ELT where expertise is defined and dominated by native speakers.

In fact teacher trainers, curriculum developers, and testing experts are predominantly from the Center. Language teaching consultants have to make periodic trips from Center academic institutions to guide, counsel, and train Periphery professionals on the latest developments in teaching. The native speaker fallacy appears to legitimize this dominance of Center professionals/scholars in the circles of expertise (p. 85).

In this paper I argue that English language in general and ELT in particular, therefore, are viewed as a bridge established by the West to help maintain the necessary connection between the West and a Third World country like the Sultanate of Oman. This type of relationship allows more reliance by the Sultanate on NABA in various fields. This is a very strong ideological act that employs a powerful instrument like language to help achieve potentially hegemonic cultural, economic and political aims.

English in Oman

In its public statements of policies, the Omani government recognizes and stresses the important and fundamental role English language is playing worldwide and that it is the language of science and technology and an effective tool for modernization. The choice of English here is primarily for transition purposes and based upon sociolinguistic, socioeconomic, sociocultural, historical and political factors (Al-Issa, 2002).

The importance of English as a language, which serves multiple purposes, is evident in the *Reform and Development of General Education* (Ministry of Education, 1995).

The text reads as follows:

The government recognises that facility in English is important in the new global economy. English is the most common language for international business and commerce and is the exclusive language in important sectors such as banking and aviation. The global language of Science and Technology is also English as are the rapidly expanding international computerised databases and telecommunications networks which are becoming an increasingly important part of academic and business life (p. A5-1).

“Global economy”, “international business and commerce”, “Science and Technology” and computer industry are all dominated by the USA at present. The Omani government is aware of and convinced by the fact that in the post-colonial/neocolonial age, the USA determines and controls the economic progress of any developing nation today as it dominates the tools and the fields that can lead to such progress.

The aforementioned excerpt is further corroborated by what is found in the *Philosophy and Guidelines for the Omani English Language School Curriculum* document (1987), prepared by Nunan (Australian), Walton (UK) and Tyacke (Canadian). This important document is a plan or a policy text for ELT in Oman. The three authors, who visited and stayed in Oman for some time in 1987, stress the importance of English “... *as the means for wider communications within the international community*” (p. 2) [emphasis in original] and “... a resource for the country’s continued development” (p. 2) and for various key areas like science and

technology. They consider English as the tool that facilitates the acquisition of science and technology, which can contribute to narrowing the “... *technology gap between the developed and the developing worlds*” [emphasis added]. English is the bridge, therefore, towards national development. Investing in ELT is seen as a part and parcel of achieving economic progress by the Sultanate of Oman. Moreover, “the international community” is dominated today politically and economically by USA, which makes communication with it something unavoidable (Al-Issa, 2002).

The Omani government has, therefore, opted for English as its only official foreign language. English in Oman is considered important for tourism, and is widely used in business, particularly in banks, chemist shops, medical clinics, showrooms, general trade stores, restaurants, factories, hotels, insurance agencies and companies (Al-Issa, 2002). English has been considered as a fundamental tool for ‘Omanization’ – a systematic and gradual replacement of foreign skilled labor by nationals. In fact, functional competence in English is a prerequisite for finding a white-collar job in the public and private sectors (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Balushi, 2001). While the population of Oman does not exceed 2.3 million, approximately 20% of this number is expatriate skilled laborers, who largely dominate the private sector, and who mainly represent countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Philippine and use English for interlingual purposes. Oman has, hence, embraced English and placed it at the heart of its educational planning, which has led to the investment of multi million US dollars since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said came to power in 1970.

ELT in Public Education

English is taught in public and private schools, colleges, universities and state institutes. In the public sector, English is taught from Grade One in the Basic System of Education as a compulsory 'school subject' on the curriculum. English is considered as another fact-based school subject to memorize and pass and is characterized as textbook-based, production-oriented and teacher-centered. Moreover, classes are large (35-45 students in each classroom) with students of mixed ability. Furthermore, resources allocated to ELT are below satisfactory – lacking educational technology facilities such as multi-media labs – and largely hinder communicative and interactive language teaching (Al-Issa, 2002).

The national syllabus used in public schools is produced locally at the English Language Curriculum Department (ELCD) – Ministry of Education. The textbooks lack challenge and are largely teacher-proof (Al-Issa, 2002). The team responsible for writing and editing the textbook is made up of British members: one Textbook Editor, two Authors and one Media Officer. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education recruits a British Chief Teacher Trainer and a British Chief Inspector.

ELT in Public Higher Institutes

English is taught for general purposes (EGP) at the Institute of Sharia Sciences and Royal Oman Police using imported ELT materials from NABA, but no NESTs are recruited. On the other hand, English is taught for general and specific purposes (ESP) in institutions like the Institute of Health Sciences, Higher Colleges of Technology, the College of Banking and Financial Studies, the College of Sharia and Law, the Colleges of Education, Sultan Qaboos University and the Royal Air Force of Oman Academy.

English is the medium of instruction in all the science-based majors in these public institutions. English is also taught for academic purposes (EAP) at the Institutes of Health Sciences and Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to equip the students with the necessary skills to produce assignments and research papers in English. All these institutions mainly use imported ELT materials from NABA and a few in-house written materials. Some of these institutions recruit a good number of NESTs. The College of Banking and Financial Studies is the only institution affiliated with four foreign institutions: The University of Strathclyde in U.K., Association of Chartered Certified Accountants in U.K., Institute of Canadian Bankers in Canada and the National Computing Center in U.K. (see Table 1).

Table 1:

The Characteristics of ELT in the Public Higher Education Institutions in Oman.

Institution	Materials Used	Mode of English Taught	Status of English	Total Number of English Teachers & NESTs
Institutes of Medical Sciences (13 campuses)	Combination of in-house & imported	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Total number of English teachers 37. 11 NETSs: Nine British, 1 USA & 1 Australian.

College of Banking and Financial Studies (one campus)	Imported	EGP & ESP	Medium of instruction	Total number of teachers: 6. No NESTs.
College of Education (six campuses)	Imported	EGP & ESP	Taught in Year One as EGP	Total number of English teachers 45. 10 NESTs: 6 British, 3 USA & 1 Canadian.
Institute of Sharia'a Sciences	Imported	EGP	Taught in Year One as EGP	Total number of teachers: 2. No NESTs
College of Sharia'a and Law (one campus)	Imported	EGP & ESP	Taught in Year One as EGP & Year Two as ESP	Total number of teachers: 3. No NESTs.
Royal Air Force of Oman Academy (one campus)	Imported	EGP & ESP	Medium of instruction	Total number English of teachers: 61. 40 NESTs: 35 British, 2 Irish, 1 Canadian, 1 USA

Higher Colleges Of Technology (five campuses)	Imported	EGP & ESP	Medium of instruction	& 1 New Zealander. Total number of English teachers: 308. 77 NESTs: 76 Canadian & 1 British.
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Table 1 (*continued*)

Institution	Materials Used	Mode of English Taught	Status of English	Total Number of English Teachers & NESTs
SQU (one campus)	Combination of in-house & imported in the Language Center.	EGP & ESP in the Language Center. EGP, ESP & EAP in Faculty of Arts & Faculty of Education.	Medium of instruction for science-based colleges and programs, ELT and	Total number of English teachers in the Language Center: 156. 70 NESTs: 32 British, 17 American, 13 Canadian, 5

Education.

Translation
specialists

Australian & 3
Irish.

Total number of
English teachers
in Faculty of
Arts: 38.

14 NESTs: 7
USA, 4 British, 2
Canadian & 1
New Zealander.

No NESTs in
Faculty of
Education.

ELT in Private Education

There are also private institutions like private schools, colleges and universities, which are available to those who can afford the fees. The 132 private schools in Oman teach English from KG 1. All these schools use imported materials mainly from publishing powerhouses like Longman, Oxford, Cambridge, Macmillan and so forth. These materials usually, if not always, come in full packages, which include a textbook, a workbook, a teacher's guide, charts, audio and videotapes and compact disks, and which are packed with the target language culture.

There are four bilingual private schools at present, which teach all science-based subjects in English. These schools along with a few others recruit NESTs (see Table 2). These NESTs are paid more than their NNSETs counterparts in the other schools. A NEST is paid a minimum of US\$ 2,000 per month as compared to a maximum of US\$1,500 paid to the NNEST. These salaries are all tax-free.

Table 2: Breakdown of NESTs by Nationality in the Private Schools.

Total	USA	Britain	Canada	Australia	Ireland	N. Z.	Total No.
Number of							of NESTs
English							
Teachers							
220	6	16	3	5	2	1	33

ELT in Private Higher Education

At present there are 13 private colleges and three private universities. Some of these colleges are university colleges. Most of these colleges and the three universities offer First Degrees, Associate Degree and Diploma Programs in various majors. Examples of the programs offered are Accounting, Business Administration, Management Information, Information Sciences, Computer, Computer Science, Banking, Safety Technology, Fire Fighting Management, Architectural Technology, Graphic Design, Construction Management, Engineering (fire fighting, electronic, civil, mechanical and

computer), Tourism and Catering and Medicine. English is taught in its general, specific and academic forms. The medium of instruction in these institutions is exclusively English for the science-based subjects. These colleges and universities use imported ELT materials and some of them recruit a large number of NESTs. In order to obtain the Ministry of Higher Education's approval, these local institutions are required to either affiliate, or sign a memorandum of cooperation, like Nizwa University, with an internationally recognized institution. Hence, the vast majority of these institutions are affiliated with an institution from NABA (see Table 3).

Table 3:

The Characteristics of ELT in the Private Higher Education Institutions in Oman.

Institution	Academic Affiliation/ Cooperation	Mode of English Taught	Status of English	Materials Used	Total Number of English teachers & NESTs
Sohar Univ.	University of Queensland - Australia	EAP, EGP & ESP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 28. 19 NESTs: 8 British, 6 USA, 2 Canadian, 1 Australian, 1 New Zealander & 1 Irish
Nizwa Univ.	British Council – Muscat – English	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 42. 42 NESTs: 22 Canadian, 8 USA, 6

	Language Program				British, 2 Australian & 4 New Zealanders.
Dhofar Univ.	American University in Beirut	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of teachers: 8. 5 NEST: 1 Canadian & 4 British.
Sur Univ. College	Melbourne University - Australia	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 10. 9 NESTs: 9 British.
Oman Medical College	West Virginia University – USA	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 8. 4 NESTs: 1 British, 1 Canadian, 1 Australian & 1 New Zealander.
National College of Science & Technology	Westminster University – U.K. & Al-Yarmook University – Jordan	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 13. No NESTs.
Caledonian College of Engineering	Glasgow Caledonian University – U.K.	EGP, ESP & EAP.	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 17. 6 NESTs: 4 British, 1 Australian & 1 Canadian.

Majan College of	Luton University – U.K.	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 16. 5 NESTs: 2 British, 1 USA, 1 Australian & 1 New Zealander.
Muscat College	Scottish Qualification Authority & Sterling University – U.K.	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 5. 2 NESTs: 1 British & 1 Australian.

Institution	Academic Affiliation/ Cooperation	Mode of English Taught	Status of English	Materials Used	Total Number of English teachers & NESTs
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Modern College of Business & Science	University of Missouri – St. Luis – USA	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 20. 6 NESTs: 3 USA, 2 Canadian & 1 Irish.
The Fire Safety Engineer-i ng College	Central Lancashire University – U.K.	EGP, ESP & EAP.	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 8. 7 NESTs: 6 British & 1 New Zealander.
Mazoon	University of	EGP, ESP	Medium of	Imported	Total number of

College for Management & Applied Sciences	Missouri – Rolla - USA	& EAP.	instruction		English teachers: 6. 4 NESTs: 2 Canadian, 1 British & 1 USA.
Al-Buraimi College	California State University Northridge - USA	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 6. 4 NESTs: 4 British.
Middle East College of Information Technology	Manipal Academy of Higher Education - India	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 7. 1 NEST: 1 New Zealander.
Al-Zahra College for Girls	Al-Ahliya Amman University- Jordan	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction in English Literature, Translation & Teaching English	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 10. No NESTs.

Waljat College of Applied Sciences	Birla Institute of Technology - India	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 8. No NESTs.
Scientific College of Designs	Lebanese American University	EGP, ESP & EAP	Medium of instruction	Imported	Total number of English teachers: 1. No NESTs.

Most of these private universities and colleges were established in the last decade or so and none of them is accredited thus far. Each of these institutes runs its own foundation and specialization programs, which are supervised and monitored by the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges at the Ministry of Higher Education. Such programs entail various problems related to the program structure and content, students' acceptance, assessment, material design, provision and selection, teacher recruitment, facilities and equipment and resources allocation (Higher Education Workshop on Quality Assurance in Foundation Year Programs: Realities and Challenges, 2005). Such fundamental aspects of quality assurance, which some of these colleges and universities have only partly achieved, are part and parcel of the overall accreditation system.

English Teachers and Teacher Training and Education

As far as in-service English language teacher education is concerned, the Ministry of Education has signed a multi-million US Dollar agreement almost five years back with the University of Leeds – U.K. to run an in-service teacher training program in the

Sultanate to help upgrade the level of 1060 English language teachers over a period of eight years (2000-2008) to a Bachelor of Arts level. These teachers hold a Diploma certificate from the Intermediate Teacher Training College – two years of teacher training after completing secondary education. The B.A. program is designed and taught by an academic staff from the University of Leeds, who are ten in total (nine British and one American). There are also nine British Teacher Trainers and a British Programs/Project Manager.

It is noteworthy that Oman is not self-sufficient with regard to qualified teachers of English. According to the figures obtained from the Ministry of Education database in 2005, there are 1,934 Omani teachers of English in the 1,019 public schools as opposed to 2,399 expatriates. While Nunan et al. (1987) believe that trained Omani teachers entering the ELT force can have a considerable impact on the system and show more commitment than their expatriate counterparts, they stress that the financial and professional incentives are weak. 'Professional' here refers to in-service training sessions to help such teachers update their continuing development in theoretical, methodological and curriculum development to allow them to reflect on all aspects of their work. Another kind of professional incentives is awarding the more capable teachers post-graduate studies in TESOL and Applied Linguistics.

SQU is the only institution at present that trains Omani English teachers and the number graduating from there annually does not exceed 120. However, the Colleges of Education started training English teachers at the undergraduate level only two years back. Like the private colleges and universities, the Colleges of Education, which fall

under the Directorate General of Colleges of Education at the Ministry of Higher Education, suffer in turn from accreditation problems related to their programs and institutions, despite the fact that some of them are quality assured in certain aspects.

Teachers graduating from SQU have come under scrutiny (Al-Issa, 2002) and found lacking language and methodological competence. This has been partly attributed to several shortcomings in the overall structure and quality of delivery of the ELT academic and training program they have been attending at SQU (Al-Toubi, 1998; Al-Issa, 2005 a, b) and partly to the overall structure of the ELT education system (Al-Issa, 2005 a).

Omani Students in NABA

The figures obtained from the Ministry of Higher Education database in 2005 indicate that there is also a large number of Omani undergraduate (1206) (see Table 4) and postgraduate students (624) (see table 5) attending different arts and science-based programs in NABA like education, arts, languages, information, commerce and administrative sciences, economics and political sciences, agriculture, engineering, medicine, computer, pharmacology and so forth.

The annual intake capacity of the various public higher education institutions is low (under 10,000 seats available in 2004-05) compared to the number of students graduating from secondary school every year (exceeded 40,000 in 2004-05). Enrollment in private colleges and universities is open to those who can afford the relatively high fees.

As far as the postgraduate level is concerned, only SQU – the only state-owned university throughout the Sultanate and which was opened in 1986, offers Masters degree programs in some subjects like education, arts, agriculture and science.

Table 4: Breakdown of Omani Undergraduate Students Studying in NABA

Major	Britain & Ireland	USA	Canada	Australia
Medicine	86	6	0	4
Pharmacology	28	0	1	1
Engineering	264	74	19	35
Science	72	6	3	3
Agriculture	5	1	0	0
Education	7	7	1	0
Computer	34	41	11	9
Arts	29	14	0	5
Law	12	2	0	4
Commerce & Administrative Sciences	25	109	16	39

Table 4 (*continued*)

Major	Britain & Ireland	USA	Canada	Australia
Economic & Political Sciences	6	10	0	2

Information	1	2	0	0
Languages	1	3	1	0
Other Subjects	62	32	0	3
Total	732	307	52	115

Table 5: Breakdown of Omani Postgraduate Students Studying in NABA

Major	Britain & Ireland	USA	Canada	Australia
Medicine	42	8	48	8
Pharmacology	3	1	0	0
Engineering	39	10	5	4
Science	43	10	3	8
Agriculture	22	7	0	1
Education	45	17	3	8
Computer	11	7	0	8
Arts	37	6	1	5
Law	11	3	0	2
Commerce & Administrative	93	23	1	35
Sciences				
Economic & Political Sciences	11	5	0	4
Information	5	1	0	1
Islamic Law	3	0	0	0
Other Subjects	8	4	1	3
Total	373	102	62	87

These students are required to take the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) as a compulsory placement test imposed by NABA universities to help determine the Omani students' competence in English prior to embarking on any academic program. This applies to all undergraduate students pursuing their First Degree program in NABA, while it is applicable to those who have obtained their First Degree from Arabic-medium universities and would like to pursue their postgraduate studies in NABA. While the IELTS is a British (University of Cambridge) test, the TOEFL is American. While the former is administered by the British Council, the Center for British Teachers Education Services and Hawthorn Muscat English Language Center (Australian) and the English language Services (American), the latter is conducted by the English Language Services and the American Information Agency. Students pay approximately US\$ 135 to take each test. A special preparation course can be attended for at least two weeks prior to taking each test at a separate cost. Those who score low marks on either test, who are usually the vast majority, take a minimum of six months language improvement course in the country where they are going to study. The cost of these courses (tuition fees) ranges from US\$ 5,000 – 10,000 per calendar year. This is in addition to the fees paid for the full academic program at the university, which varies from one country to another, one university to another and one program to another. There are also additional fees paid by the government to the students on scholarship to NABA and other countries. These include living, airfare tickets, books and clothes. Each student in each NABA country costs the Omani government approximately US\$ 23,000 – 26,000 per academic year.

ELT Conferences

Another aspect of the cultural and economic politics of ELT in the Sultanate is the ELT conferences held by the Language Center at SQU and the ELCD at the Ministry of Education in which scientific research papers about ELT are presented and discussed. While the former is of a regional nature, the latter is strictly domestic and confined to those involved in ELT within the Sultanate. While the former started in 2000, the latter started in the mid-1990s. Both conferences are open to presenters from all over the country and from the region in the case of the Language Center. Moreover, both conferences invite speakers from NABA for the plenary sessions. The Omani government, as represented in SQU or the Ministry of Education, pays all the expenses to these speakers to attend the conference and present a paper or two. They can be material designers, syllabus writers, book authors, or researchers in ELT. In the case of the Language Center conference, papers presented are later published as proceedings.

Furthermore, book fairs are also organized at the time of holding these conferences. Different local bookshops participate in these fairs where they promote and sell various ELT textbooks, dictionaries, teacher's reference books and audiovisual materials. These ELT materials are all imported mainly from British publishing houses like Oxford, Cambridge, Longman, Macmillan and some others.

Private English Language Institutes

Various NABA and local agencies have contributed to the firm establishment of English in Oman outside the Omani education system. There are 15 private English language

institutes throughout the Sultanate, which offer various English language improvement courses for different levels and ages and are found throughout the Sultanate with the majority in Muscat Area. This is due to various reasons related to the cosmopolitan nature of Muscat, its population density when compared to the other parts of the Sultanate and the variable domains of English. This makes the demand for English relatively higher than it is the case in the other parts of Oman. Also, the ministries, which are located in Muscat, usually send their employees for language development courses to these institutes throughout the year. The courses' duration varies from two to 10 weeks and ranges between approximately US\$ 150 - 2,000 depending on the length and type of the course. "Type" here refers to English for general or academic purposes, or business English.

Five of these private English language institutes are located in the Muscat area. The more reputable and popular ones are the British Council, which has been in Oman for over three decades, Center for British Teachers Education Services, which has been in Oman for two decades, the English Language Services (American), which is an American franchise with branches in different parts of the world and which was opened in the late 1990s and Hawthorn Muscat English Language Center, which was opened in 2002 and which is owned by the Melbourne University Private – Australia and which has five more branches in other parts of the world like Singapore, New Zealand and Canada, for instance. While the British Council and the Center for British Teachers recruit British teachers only, the ELS confines its recruitment to Americans. Hawthorn Muscat in turn has a strict policy of recruiting native speakers. Their teaching staff comes from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The British Council also provides

advice to those willing to travel to U.K. at their expense for language improvement purposes or in order to pursue their university education at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

There is further the Australian Agency for Education and Training in Muscat, which liaises with the Ministry of Higher Education and different Australian universities the Omani students are studying at, since there is no diplomatic representation between the Sultanate and Australia. There is also Polyglot in Muscat, which is affiliated with the University of Southern Queensland in Australia. It is a local institute, which exclusively recruits NESTs.

NABA Universities Fairs

Moreover, American, Australian and British universities fairs are held annually in Muscat in order to promote the programs offered by the participating universities in these countries. Representatives of the various participating universities attend and gather for a few days in one place. Students and parents and other members of the society attend to find out about the various programs offered by the advertised universities. The universities' representatives are authorized to give acceptances on the spot, if the student submits the required papers. Only universities approved by the Omani Ministry of Higher Education are allowed to participate.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As a developing Third World Arab country in a post-colonial/neocolonial context with a shortage in human and physical resources, Oman has been lagging behind in terms of

science, technology and language-in-education planning, which are interwoven factors and very important for economic success in today's world. Meantime, a super and imperial power like USA is leading and dominating the world politics and economics in the current age and has considerable capital interests in an oil producing and strategically located country like the Sultanate of Oman. This has subsequently lead Oman to accept the adoption of English language and invest in teaching it so as to fundamentally facilitate the acquisition of such science and technology through the establishment of effective communication channels. Thus, the substantial dependency by a developing country like Oman on countries like Australia, Canada, UK and USA in planning language in education, hence, has subsequently forced the Sultanate to accept cultural and educational dependency as part of its existence and reality.

However, this substantial dependency can be largely and gradually overcome provided certain actions are taken. First, more attention needs to be given to local manpower training and development. In other words, the Sultanate needs to train more Omanis in the field of second language education at the graduate and post-graduate levels. Such training has to meet international and high standards so as to help produce competent professionals who can take over from the NABA working force. This competent manpower can in turn have its direct and powerful impact upon producing linguistically competent language users. Well-prepared Omani English teachers, inspectors, syllabus writers and others in the field understand the needs and problems of the Omani learners best and can work towards meeting these needs and overcoming these problems. This can have its long lasting and powerful effect on the Omani students' second language learning and acquisition, as these students embark on various

courses in the future where English is the medium of instruction and hence will not need any actual prior language improvement courses.

Second, more investment is needed in educational technology to help prepare the Omani students for the job market, where competence in English language is a prerequisite. English language and technology go hand in glove today. In addition, technology at present has its direct and powerful impact upon language learning and acquisition and motivation (Savignon, 2002). Resources allocated to second language education at present are below satisfactory and hinder communicative language learning and teaching to a great extent.

Third, there are a good number of well-equipped private universities and colleges in Oman at present (see Table 3). However, none of these institutes is accredited. The Omani government represented in the Ministry of Higher Education needs to play its role here in pressing such universities and colleges to pursue obtaining their accreditation. Once this is achieved, students can enrol in these colleges and universities, which should cut down scholarship costs to NABA substantially.

Last but not least, there is a pressing need to establish a national language education research center that can diagnose the various academic, technical and vocational needs of the Sultanate. Such a center can help set future plans for Oman's needs and participate in various language education development, research, training and teaching projects and programs. The various private and public higher education institutes throughout the Sultanate have been working more or less in isolation from each other.

Such a center can make use of the expertise available in such institutes and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in addition to recruiting its own. Such collaborative work is much needed at this stage and should prove fruitful. _____

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