

**Higher Education ELT Curricula at a Crossroads: Confusions
and Tensions in the Omani Context**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the purpose and practice of Omani higher education from the perspective of education providers in the field. Specifically, this research examines the tensions and confusion among academics, administrators and policy makers and how they view the provision of the English language curriculum at undergraduate level. The literature seems to indicate that, despite the significant advancement evidenced in the recent reforms, there remain unresolved tensions concerning the provision of higher education. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is little or no empirical evidence of how these tensions might be played out 'on the ground' among people who are currently involved in higher education in Oman.

Employing an interpretive paradigm as a methodological approach, this thesis engages with Clark's (1987) philosophical framework. This framework highlights three curriculum philosophies, namely: classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism, which potentially conflict with each other. Through the content analysis of interviews and documents, the thesis shows stakeholders' thinking about the ELT curriculum in terms of school mission, curriculum aim, knowledge, learning, the role of teacher, the role of student and assessment. It also explores the process of curriculum planning and the role of policy documents. The research shows how the provision of higher education has been interpreted and implemented at the institutional level. It shows how higher education reforms are viewed and how these reforms are affecting the provision in higher education.

The study has found that there are tensions and muddles on the ground, as various interpretations of curriculum are brought to bear by different stakeholders. The study shows that there are contradictions in the stakeholders' way of thinking about the purpose and practice of the English language curriculum. More interestingly and importantly, these tensions are evident not only among the groups of stakeholders but also within individuals, based on their educational beliefs and backgrounds. The study aims to contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge on the purpose and practice of higher education in general and English language curricula in particular in respect to the undergraduate level. It also intends to inform policy makers, curriculum specialists and teachers of the existing practices and issues in the Omani higher education.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The main focus of this study is to examine the purpose and practice of higher education from the perspective of education providers in the field. Specifically, this research examines the tensions and confusion among academics, administrators and policy makers in Oman, and how they view the provision of the English language curriculum at undergraduate level. An investigation in this area is timely and important as higher education in Oman is facing challenges on a number of issues including quality of programmes provided, meeting the labour market needs for qualified workforce and preserving an Arabic, Omani identity (Al-Balushi, 2008; Al-Harhi, 2011; Badry & Willoughby, 2015; Brandenburg, 2012; Donn & Al Manthri, 2010; Romano & Seeger 2014). These issues have arisen from Omanisation and economic globalisation. In terms of globalisation, which has affected most of the world, Oman has produced an economic strategy plan, Vision 2020. The objective is to encourage the private sector to play a major role in the national economy by diversifying the economy and creating new jobs for Omanis. Like Oman, other countries in the region have similar plans for their future. They share the same aspirations of becoming knowledge societies and attaining great economic development. Examples of these visions in GCC countries include Vision 2021 in UAE, Vision 2030 in Qatar, Vision 2031 in Kuwait, and Vision 2031 in Bahrain (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 206). These visions were set with the expectation of transforming economies as well as keeping Arab culture and traditional values. This has led these countries to implement major educational reforms. In today's world, universities are required to prepare students for knowledge economy societies. These changes have shifted higher education from public good to a 'traded commodity' where

institutions operate for market purpose values (Altbach, 2006). This has resulted in the rise of new model of westernization and has altered the higher education mission to preparing graduates for the labour market. In other words, universities and colleges in Oman, and many other countries around the world, are not only under pressure to educate the young generation, but also to provide required competencies such as the ability to think critically and solve problems in order to enter a competitive global labour market.

Due to the nature of the recent higher education reforms following the stated objectives of Vision 2020, it is inevitable that tensions and confusion will have been generated among stakeholders who come from different traditions, backgrounds and experiences. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is little or no empirical evidence of how these tensions might be played out 'on the ground' among people who are currently involved in higher education in Oman, how these reforms are viewed and how these reforms are affecting the provision in higher education. It is evident that there is the possibility of confusion at the thinking level. Moreover, the current practices may not align with the goals of higher education, because of the contradictory views within Vision 2020. Thus, the main objective of this research is to explore this muddled confusion is by consulting the real stakeholders in the process.

In order to address this objective and shed light on the tensions and confusion, English language programme at the undergraduate level will be examined in an Omani institution. The present research is underpinned by the following core research question: What are the potential tensions and confusion among stakeholders in higher education and how do they play out on the ground?

In order to answer this question, secondary research questions comprise:

1. How do policymakers view the purpose and practice of higher education?

2. How do administrators view the purpose and practice of higher education?
3. How do ELT teachers view the purpose and practice of higher education?

In line with these research questions, the research aims to contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge on the provision and practice of higher education in general and English language curricula in particular in respect to the undergraduate level. It also intends to provide insights, which could inform the current state of affairs and existing issues in Omani higher education, and provide information to Omani policy makers for future curriculum practices with regard to tertiary programmes. These policy makers include the Ministry of higher education, the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority and higher education institutions. Moreover, it will provide evidence of ELT curriculum practices in the Omani context. It is hoped that the findings of this research will help Omani language policy makers, curriculum specialists, and teachers gain a better understating of curriculum design at the tertiary level.

Moreover, the investigation of how the English language curriculum is put into practice in an Omani tertiary context will provide important implications for future research. This research can inform the area of second language learning and teaching in the field of applied linguistics by helping to increase the body of knowledge that is available in terms of curriculum planning pertaining to tourism and hospitality fields. Teaching English to undergraduate tourism and hospitality management students seems never to have been explored in the Omani context. Furthermore, despite the importance of English language and ELT in Oman, Al-Issa (2011) highlighted the weaknesses found in the ELT programmes in Gulf Council Countries (GCC), including Oman. Thus, this study is a contribution to the field in the region. It is hoped to bridge the gap in the curriculum planning of ELT and keep the field current with developments in order to

raise the quality of teaching and learning in Oman. It also aims to contribute to the existing theoretical knowledge in the area of ELT curriculum studies.

The aim of the rest of this chapter is to describe the contextual background for this study. It explains the social and economic changes that have taken place in Oman in general, the development of the education system and the evolution of the tertiary education in Oman. It also provides the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Overview Oman: Geographical and economic patterns

The Sultanate of Oman is an Arab country in the southwest of Asia. It shares borders with the United Arab Emirates, Yemen and Saudi Arabia (See Figure 1). It is the second largest country, in size and population, in the Arabian Peninsula. At the end of May 2016, Oman's total population was 4,44 million, expatriates numbered 2.02 million, forming 45.5% of the total population (Times of Oman, 2016). Although Arabs constitute the majority of Oman's population, there are non-Arab communities including Baluchi – from Iran and Pakistan and Zanzibari – from Africa. Arabic is the official language but Baluchi, Swahili and English are widely spoken. In technology, business and higher education, English is used more than Arabic. Oman is divided into nine: four governorates (Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, Al Buraimi), and five regions (Al Batinah, Ash Sharqiyah, Ad Dakhliyah, Ad Dhahirah, Al Wusta). Muscat is the capital city.



Figure 1 Map of the Sultanate of Oman (Maps of World, 2017)

Following the ascension of Sultan Qaboos to the throne in 1970, Oman has seen significant economic and societal changes. It has been transformed from depending on agriculture and trade to a high-income economy (AL Rawahi, 2011: 4). This is due to the discovery of oil in 1964. Oman depends on oil revenues heavily. The oil sector is the major contributor to the Omani gross domestic product (GDP) with a 42.2% contribution in 2012, as compared to the other sectors such as manufacturing (9.7%) and trade (7.8%). This shows that the oil sector is the most important factor in the economy (Al-Mawali et al., 2016: 120).

In 2011, the government acknowledged that the future of oil reserves is uncertain and limited (Brandenburg, 2012: 32). The next sections in this study will show the insistence of the Omani government in its long-term strategic plan on diversifying the economy and

the development of human resources through education and training, and encouraging the private sector to play a major role in the national economy. These endeavours are vital for the Sultanate's future.

1.3 Omani Education: A historical perspective

The education system in Oman has shown a remarkable progress over the last forty-five years. Before 1970, there was no formal education system. There were no schools, colleges or universities (Al Shmeli, 2009: 1) . The common form of education was the 'Kuttab'. 'Kuttab', an old-fashioned, Islamic method of education where a sheikh, who sits on the ground, teaches a group of students the Holy Quran, in a mosque, or in houses or under trees. There were no classrooms, chairs or desks. There was no curriculum and students were mainly taught to recite and memorize the Quran. In 1969-1970, three schools were built with 30 teachers and about 900 male students studying basic subjects such as Islamic and Arabic culture (Al-Maskri et al., 2012: 40).

After 1970, the early years of developing education emphasized the quantity of education by building schools throughout the country in order to educate all children (Al Rawahi, 2010: 4). In 1981 the number of schools had increased to 389 and the number of students to 106,032 (Rassekh, 2004: 8). At that time, schools worked three shifts to accommodate all students. However, by the year 2013/14 the number of schools had increased to 1,050 schools all over Oman. The number of students had also increased with approximately 541,436 of both genders and about 43,672 teachers (Al-Maskri et al., 2012: 40).

Following the focus on quantity of education, more attention was given to quality. In the period 1981-1995, the first national curriculum was introduced in schools. At that time the school structure was six years of primary education, three years of preparatory education and three years of secondary education. Moreover, the government started to

give more attention to the higher education sector by opening the first national university. At this stage, specific measures were introduced to improve the quality of education. These measures included constructing and equipping adequate buildings for schools, eliminating shift schools, teacher training, preparation and delivery of adequate textbooks and delivery of necessary teaching equipment (Rassekh, 2004: 9).

After 1995, a period of educational reforms started where the government emphasized the role of education in facing the challenges of the millennium and ensuring that all young Omani people have access to a quality education system. The shifts from a quantitative to a qualitative focus in education and the recent educational reforms are attributed to both globalisation and Omanisation (Al'Abri, 2011: 499). These two forces have had a great impact on educational policy in Oman. More details will be provided in the next sections.

1.4 Omani Tertiary Education

Over the past quarter century, substantial efforts have been made to improve tertiary education. Financed by government scholarships, secondary school leavers at the beginning of the Omani renaissance were encouraged to continue their studies in overseas higher education institutions. In the late 1970s, the first colleges offering vocational and technical programmes were established. These colleges focused mainly on national priorities of teacher training and healthcare. With the exportation of oil in the early 1980s, which had led to establishing Oman's socio-economic renaissance, there was a rising demand for local higher educational opportunities (Brandenburg, 2012: 108). Thus, in order to promote the country's economy and the employability of Omani citizens a series of educational initiatives were undertaken.

Public Higher Education has grown rapidly since the establishment of the first Higher Education Institution in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 1986. SQU is the

only public university in the country. Since then, the number of colleges has been increased, offering different kinds of programs: there are now seven Higher Colleges of Technology, sixteen institutes for health sciences and six Colleges of Applied Sciences. Higher education in the public sector is free of charge to all Omani students. In the early stages, employment was assured upon graduating.

Omani higher education is controlled by different organizations. In addition to the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), which was established in 1994, the ministries of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, Health, Awqaf and Religious Affairs and Central Bank of Oman are responsible for specific institutions (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 104; Brandenburg, 2012: 108). Table 1 shows different HEIs in Oman operating through various ministries and agencies.

Under the Jurisdiction of	Higher Education Institutes	No. of Institutes
Independent	Sultan Qaboos University	1
Ministry of Higher Education	Colleges of Applied Sciences	6
	Private Universities	5
	Private (and University) Colleges	19
Ministry of Manpower	Higher College of Technology	1
	Colleges of Technology	5
	Oman Tourism College	1
Ministry of Health	Nursing Institutes	11
	Health Science Institutes	5
Ministry of Defense	Academies / Training Centers	4
	The Command and Staff College	1
Ministry of Aqaf and Religious Affairs	The Institute of Shari'a Sciences	1
Royal Oman Police	The Royal Oman Police Academy	1
Central Bank of Oman	The College of Banking & Financial Studies	1
Total number of HEIs		62

Table 1 Government and private HEIs in Oman (Al Shmeli, 2009:3)

The decline of oil production in the mid 1990s had an impact on government spending on public higher education. The increased enrolment in public HEIs was a major cost. As a result, the government could no longer fund these HEIs and assuring employment for graduates was unsustainable (Brandenburg, 2012: 109). Moreover, the number of secondary school graduates reached 15,000 in the academic year 1990/1991. Only 25% of these graduates were admitted in the public HEIs (Ibid:110). This indicates that only highly achieving graduates could have access to these HEIs. It also shows the shortage of admission capacity in the country. As a consequence, thousands of Omanis studied abroad, mainly in public HEIs in the UAE, which were free of charge for GCC nationals. However, these HEIs in the UAE had a bad reputation as they offered social and Islamic sciences only. Moreover, graduates of these HEIs were not entitled to work in the public sector. A larger number of Omani students had no chance to get a university degree and no opportunity to obtain a job in the public sector. Faced with all these issues, the government was forced to expand and modernise the existing higher education system.

1.5 Omanization and youth employment

During the early stages of Oman's development process, the government had to depend on expatriate labour to achieve numerous projects. However, upon the government's realization that the over-reliance on expatriate labour would have serious economic consequences for Omani society in the future, an Omanization policy was introduced in 1988. The purpose of Omanization is to replace expatriate workers with trained Omani personnel. Omanization has resulted in improving the higher education system. Several universities and colleges have been opened to train Omani citizens. The Omanization policy is seen as an essential part of citizenship. Any policy that regulates the private and public sectors has an impact on historical and cultural conceptions of identity (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010: 45).

However, there have been problems with unemployment in spite of the implementation of the Omanization policy. Although an Omani workforce has replaced the jobs that require the Arabic language, many jobs are still dominated by expatriates, mainly from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Brandenburg, 2012: 32). In 2001, 11.9% of the Omani labour force were unemployed and this number had risen to 21% in 2008 (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010: 46). In early 2011, young Omanis protested throughout the country against the government to show their dissatisfaction with politics, the economy and the labour market. There were complaints about unemployment and corruption. This led to the creation of 50,000 public jobs for citizens. However, expatriates comprised 73.68 % of the total workforce in the private sector in 2013 (Romano & Seeger, 2014: 22). Most policy makers have acknowledged national citizens' lack of participation in the national economy (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 50). A significant barrier against young Omanis' participation in the private sector is their unwillingness to accept low wage jobs compared to the public sector. Moreover, many business owners prefer to hire foreign workers for lower wages.

Another obstacle to Omani participation in the private sector is that many young Omanis do not have the work skills necessary for the private sector industries such as gas and oil, tourism, insurance, banks and communications. The shortage of skilled Omanis is caused by an Omani education system that continues to produce students with skills which are not in high demand (Romano & Seeger, 2014: 28). There is increasing criticism against the public HEIs for providing education that is inappropriate for the era of globalisation. They are accused of failing to transform college students into workers who have the required skills. Moreover, the different organizations and ministries controlling public HEIs are blamed for the difficulty to agree on strategies (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 104). Public HEIs could not accommodate the large number of secondary school

graduates. In 2005-2006, only 40% (around 20,000) were able to enrol in HEIs, either inside or outside the country (MOHE, 2006).

Given these political and economic difficulties, the increase of secondary school leavers and the rising demand of the labour market for qualified workforce, more pressure is placed on the educational system to produce skilled and creative national workers. The government needed a plan to face these challenges.

1.6 Oman's Vision 2020: An Economic Plan

With the recognition of the uncertain future of the limited oil reserves, the fast growing national population and in order to face the challenges of globalisation, diversification of the economy was seen as a priority by the government. In 1995, Oman's 2020 Vision, a strategic economic plan, was announced. The vision suggested that the government should achieve numerous targets by the year 2020. Among these targets are: 1) economic and financial stability; 2) changing the role of the investment in the economy and broadening private sector participation; 3) diversifying the economic base and sources of national income; 4) upgrading the skills of the Omani workforce and developing human resources (Romano & Seeger, 2014: 34). The objective is to encourage the private sector to play a major role in the national economy by diversifying the economy and creating new jobs for Omanis. Diversifying the economy in the country is targeting areas of industry including tourism, heavy industry, large infrastructure projects, agriculture and fishing.

Moreover, upgrading the skills of the Omani workforce and developing human resources have been given special attention to help the growth of the economy. In order to face the challenges at the local and international levels, the focus on human resource development is to:

‘Develop human resources and the capabilities of the Omani people to generate and manage technological changes efficiently, in addition to facing the continuously changing local and international conditions, in a way that ensures maintaining the Omani traditions and customs’ (Oman Economic and Development Strategy Handbook, 2008: 144).

In addition to the need to respond to the rapid changes in the world and the development of skilled workforce, vision 2020 affirms that Oman must preserve its Omani, Arab identity and Arabic language.

1.7 The structure of the Thesis

This study is divided into five chapters. This chapter presents an introduction and background to the research setting (the Sultanate of Oman), research questions and the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two provides the literature review and discusses key concepts that help to inform the study. It also introduces and critically evaluates the relevant literature.

Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, in which a description of the research methods, data collection and analysis procedures is given. The ethical considerations and the limitations of the current study will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter Four presents the analysis of data and reports the results. In addition, it discusses the key findings drawn from the analysis of data of the current study, focusing on linking the findings to the context of the study and the related literature.

Finally, chapter Five summarizes the findings of the current study and suggests theoretical and pedagogical implications.

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the history and the development of Omani education. The Omani education system has shown a remarkable progress over the last forty-five years. However, in the recent years more pressure has been placed on an educational system to produce skilled and creative national workers. Oman Vision 2020 has provided a roadmap to face the challenges. This has led to critical changes in public policies especially, educational reforms. These reforms seem to reflect global and international trends, including moves towards knowledge economy, technological progress, a global curriculum, lifelong learning, international testing and English as the global language. The next chapter addresses these trends more extensively. In addition to the background of the Omani context, this chapter provided the structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the impact of globalisation and the fast changing labour market in Oman has been discussed. It has been argued that the new technologies and the diversification of the economy towards service industries have created a different structure of employment. It has opened up new opportunities for career prospects.

However, these developments present huge challenges in Oman, particularly in the field of higher education. This chapter reviews different aspects of policy issues and reforms in the discourse of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education, with particular reference to Oman.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section One provides an overview of Omani government policy of higher education. Section Two describes higher education reforms, with particular focus on rationales and trends of internationalisation of higher education in Oman which lead to a set of issues which are now facing Omani higher education. Finally, Section Three deals with these issues and shows how they lead inevitably to tensions and conflicts.

2.2 Oman Government policy for Higher Education

The expansion and globalisation of higher education have not occurred spontaneously in Oman. Politics plays an important role in determining the type of HEIs to be created, how they are financed and the types of regulations to be followed (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 39). These decisions require a vision of higher education that guides policy makers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, affected by globalisation and economic and social pressures, Oman has produced an economic strategy plan, Vision 2020. The objective is to encourage the private sector to play a major role in the national economy by diversifying the economy and creating new jobs for Omanis. The government aims to

change the position of its national economy in order to take advantage of the emerging global trends. This can be achieved by promoting a higher education system that:

- a. Keeps pace with developments and changes in today's world
- b. Meets the requirements of sustainable development in the knowledge era, while preserving the cultural identity of Oman society
- c. Contributes to the progress and development of humankind.

(Badry & Willoughby, 2015)

Thus, the development of the economy is linked to knowledge. Only a skilled and competent workforce will gain more opportunities in the global markets. According to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education:

‘Our vision for education in the Sultanate stems from the commitment of Omani citizens who strongly believe in the noble tents of Islam and who honour their traditional Arab heritage. They will take Oman forward into the global world as a fully modern nation noted for its contribution to science and to the advancement of human civilization in the new era of knowledge. And this will be achieved through a new approach to education that supports the nation's economic and social development, that is relevant, that meets international standards, and that ensures that all Omanis have the required skills and competencies for life and for the workforce; and that perpetuates life-long learning’ (MOHE & MOE, 2006)

This indicates that education is being perceived economically and that knowledge has become the driver of socioeconomic development in Oman.

As well as developing a national economy and workforce to compete in the modern economic world, Vision 2020 assures the importance of preserving Omani culture. The purpose of doing this is to protect the Omani culture and also to train modern Omani

citizens and make them feel responsible for their country. Thus, Omani higher education should help young Omanis to identify with their culture.

Oman is not alone in this kind of vision. Other countries in the region have similar plans for their future. They share the same aspirations of becoming knowledge societies and attaining great economic development. Examples of these visions in GCC countries include Vision 2021 in UAE, Vision 2030 in Qatar, Vision 2031 in Kuwait, and Vision 2031 in Bahrain (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 206). Like Oman, these visions were set with the expectation to transform economies as well as keeping Arab culture and traditional values. This has led these countries to implement major educational reforms. Additionally, the GCC governments have been encouraged to make changes by other education policy makers. Between 2002 and 2005, four documents entitled ‘The Arab Human Development Report’ were released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In these reports, different development policies have been assessed including the educational status of the Arab population. One of the reports indicates that one of the gaps in Arab societies is knowledge. The report stresses that creating a competent workforce is a way to overcome the economic challenges. Thus, the main goal for reforming education is to construct a knowledge society. This has been criticized, as it focuses on using science to increase the number of skilled Arab professionals rather than looking at higher education as an experience that fosters personal creativity and critical thinking (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 40). Despite this, Oman has embraced the goal of creating a knowledge society in order to create a skilled workforce that can direct technology and industries.

2.3 Changes to higher education policy worldwide

The pressures of economic globalisation and the fear of policy makers of becoming economically irrelevant have led to calls for higher education reforms worldwide. The

recent view of higher education as a promoter of economic growth has turned knowledge into a commodity, as Altbach (2006:33) notes:

‘A revolution is taking place in education. Education is becoming an internationally traded commodity. No longer is it seen as a set of skills, attitudes and values required for citizenship and effective participation in modern society – a key contribution to the common good of any society. Rather it is seen as a commodity to be purchased in the market place or a product to be bought and sold by multinational corporations, academic institutions that have transmogrified themselves into business, and other providers’.

Economic competitiveness is a key for development and growth. Based on this, education, around the world, is expected to train and educate people to serve knowledge economies. Thus, decision makers including business leaders, educators and politicians in different countries have been looking for solutions to improve competitiveness (Sahlberg, 2006: 262). Market-based educational reforms have been set and different institutions and academic systems try to accommodate these reforms in different ways. One of these ways is the internationalization of higher education (Altbach, 2001). Over the past two decades, the concept 'internationalisation of higher education' in the global arena has received central attention in international declarations, national policy statements, university missions and academic articles (De Wit, 2011b: 242). Until the mid-1980s, the activities of internationalization were not named and were isolated and unrelated (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011:15). However, the term internationalisation of education became popular in early 1990s (Coelen, 2015:36). Increasing importance has been given to internationalization, moving from simple students' exchange and élite groups to a big business, impacting a mass phenomenon (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011:15). In their report to the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education,

Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2010: 7) note:

‘Universities have always been affected by international trends and to a certain degree operated within a broader international community of academic institutions, scholars, and research. Yet, 21st century realities have magnified the importance of the global context. The rise of English as the dominant language of scientific communication is unprecedented since Latin dominated the academy in medieval Europe. Information and communications technologies have created a universal means of instantaneous contact and simplified scientific communication. At the same time, these changes have helped to concentrate ownership of publishers, databases, and other key resources in the hands of the strongest universities and some multinational companies, located almost exclusively in the developed world’.

There have been various terms used in relation to the internationalization of higher education. De Wit (2011b) states ‘as the international dimension of higher education gains more attention and recognition, people tend to use it in the way that best suits their purpose’. The commonly-used terms are either related to curriculum: intercultural and multicultural education, international and global studies or mobility: academic mobility, study abroad. (De Wit, 2011b: 243). Over the years, new group of terms have emerged. These new terms are either related to cross-border delivery of education or the impact of globalisation on higher education: education borders, global education and international trade in educational services (Ibid).

During the same period, internationalisation of higher education has moved its focus, scope and content substantially. While the internationalization of the curriculum and teaching and learning processes (described sometimes as ‘internationalisation at Home’) has remained, along with the traditional focus on mobility, cross-border delivery and the

commercialization of higher education, along with increasing competition, have challenged the traditional ways of cooperation, such as partnerships and exchanges (De Wit, 2011b: 242). This change has shifted the internationalization of higher education from a model of cooperation to one of competition. There follows an in-depth analysis of how these international trends have been, and are being, interpreted by Omani authorities in their implementation of Vision 2020.

According to Cheng et. al. (2016:3), the conceptualisation of internationalisation of higher education may vary according to different people, HEIs and countries. Some may conceptualize and manage internationalisation from an activity-based approach. Others, limited by narrow conceptions, may be driven by some myths and misconceptions about internationalisation. For example, Knight (2015) pointed out five myths about internationalisation: foreign students as internationalisation agents; the international reputation as a proxy for quality; international student agreements; international accreditation; and global branding. De Wit and Brandenburg have also written about misconceptions of internationalisation of higher education. In their paper 'The End of Internationalisation', Brandenburg and De Wit (2011) raised concerns over the increasing use of the instrumentalist approach to internationalisation and the devaluation of its meaning.

Related to the same issue of the misconception of internationalisation, De Wit (2011a) in his published 'Misconceptions about Internationalisation' mentions nine misconceptions of how internationalisation is being regarded as synonymous with a specific programmatic or organizational strategy. These misconceptions include: connecting internationalisation to teaching in English, studying abroad, teaching an international subject, having many international students; the more agreements an institution has, the more international it is, and internationalisation becomes an objective in itself.

Moreover, some of the recent practices and trends in the internationalisation of higher education have been criticized for making higher education a ‘tradable commodity’ and for overlooking the internationalisation of higher education as ‘the last stand for humanistic ideas’ (Brandenburg & De Wit, 2011:16-17). This appears to be evident in the case of Oman, as will be shown in the next sections.

Given the challenges and changes facing internationalization in higher education, a clear articulation of rationales needs to be considered (Knight, 2015c:3). Objectives, policies and programmes reflect rationales. Without clear rationales, ‘the process of internationalization is often an ad hoc and fragmented reaction to the overwhelming number of new international opportunities available’ (Ibid). In the last decade, rationales driving internationalizations have seen some important shifts. Traditionally, these rationales have been divided into four groups (De Wit & Knight, 1999:18):

1. Social/cultural rationale

This group of rationales include cultural identity, intercultural understanding, citizenship and national development. The role of universities is to create a cultural understanding and a cultural competence for staff and students in their home university. Knight and De Wit (1999:13) argue that the impact of a globalised society and economy is not limited to foreign students: even domestic students are affected by displaying their national identity abroad. Moreover, the preparation of graduates who have strong knowledge and skills in intercultural relations and communication is an important rationale for internationalizing the teaching/learning experience of students in different programmes. Furthermore, the cultural and social rationales give emphasis to the development of the individual, the student and the academic by being citizens in an international environment. Knight and De Wit (1999: 20) argues that citizenship involves more than being a productive member of the country’s economic development. However, there is a concern that the cultural

and social rationales for internationalisation are currently given less importance and are coming under pressure (De Wit, 2010: 9).

2. Political rationale

From a political point of view, international education is seen as a beneficial tool for foreign policy such as national security, and peace and mutual understanding among nations. Cultural, scientific and educational exchanges between countries are seen as a way to keep communication between countries. This rationale used to be an important objective to internationalise higher education, particularly after the Second World War and during the Cold War period (De Wit, 2010: 9). However, there is a major shift in foreign policies these days where education is seen as an export commodity. The shift to a market approach introduces the economic rationale for internationalisation of higher education. Thus the political rationale is still considered today but its importance is not as strong as before.

3. Academic rationale

The academic rationale is linked to the early history and development of HEIs. The international mobility of scholars and the international dimension to research are reasons to internationalize, from an academic point of view. Other academic reasons for internationalizing the higher education sector include the achievement of international academic standards for teaching and research, profile and status, institution building and the improvement of quality. Among these academic rationales, profile and status, as expressed in the importance of international rankings, appear to be more dominant today (De Wit, 2010: 9).

There is a concern that the promotion of academic collaboration often conflicts with commercialisation (Stein, 2004). HEIs in the USA, for example, are influenced by commercial imperatives (Aronowitz, 2000; Rhoads and Charlos, 2006; Slaughter and

Rhoades, 2004). Badry & Willoughby (2015: 24) argues that the promotion of critical thinking and liberal arts is justified either to invest for the production of skilled workforce or to create more intelligent and moral citizens who appreciate what it means to be human. It is clear that the first perspective contributes to the economy and helps HEIs to remain competitive in the modern world. While the second perspective does not necessarily contradict the first one, it does not have the same direct effect. Intellectual practices may not respond to the needs of the global economy. Thus, the emphasis on an academic rationale may affect HEIs by leading to their losing out on competition.

4. Economic rationale

The economic rationale includes growth and competitiveness, the labour market, financial incentives and national educational demand. At the present time, this group of rationales is considered to be more dominant than the other three (De Wit, 2010:9).

There has been a great focus on economic, technological and scientific competitiveness as a result of the globalisation of the economy and the information revolution. Investing in applied research and developing a highly skilled and knowledgeable workforce are seen as effective ways to improve a competitive edge. These strategies involve the higher education system. As mentioned earlier in this section, recent practices and trends have shown a closer link between the internationalisation of higher education and the economic development of the country.

Although, these categories remain a useful way to analyse rationales, there are new rationales that have emerged recently (Knight, 2015c:3). Knight (2015c:3) divides the new rationales of internationalization into two categories: at the national level (e.g., human resource development, strategic alliances, income generation/ commercial trade, nation building, social/cultural development and mutual understanding) and at the institutional level (e.g., international branding and profile, quality

enhancement/international standards, income generation, student and staff development, strategic alliances and knowledge production). For the purpose of this thesis, the traditional categorization of rationales will be explored in the next section to analyse Oman's rationales for the internationalisation of higher education.

From the above discussions, it can be seen that the nature and purpose of the internationalisation of higher education have been complicated and dynamic in the last two decades. This shows that internationalizing higher education, wherever in the world, is fraught with unanswered questions and tensions. Oman is no exception to this. In order to understand the related issues of the internationalisation of higher education in Oman and to reflect on the muddles and tensions of internationalisation, recent higher education reforms will be explored. Particular focus will be given to private HEIs expansion and policies on government scholarships. This will be followed by an analysis of the ways in which Higher Education authorities in Oman are seeking to improve education quality through introducing a range of measures including the establishment of a quality authority, international affiliation agreements, international accreditation, importing curricula and staff and using English as medium of instruction. Then, pre-tertiary education reforms will be provided.

2.4 Higher Education Reforms/The massive influence of internationalisation

Higher education reforms from the west have arrived on a large scale in GCC. As well as establishing American and European HEIs in the states, 'western'¹ style educational best practices and methodologies have been employed. This endeavour appears to square with efforts by many universities in so-called 'developing' countries where internationalisation may be seen in terms of bringing Higher Education into line with, or up to the standards

¹ Where values are concerned 'Western' is in inverted commas throughout; where western refers, factually, to particular settings, majorly the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, it is given without inverted commas.

of, western, so-called 'developed' countries. According to Badry & Willoughby (2015:208), the decisions on importing western educational practices in GCC, faculty and consultants to reform education can be accounted for by the belief that the fastest way, in general terms, to respond to the fast-paced globalisation and economic transformation is by importing curricula and expertise from the developed West. Although these shifts provide opportunities for countries to create global citizens who can help in the fast changing economic and political times, the rapid increase of 'western' learning contexts is considered as a challenge for those working with them (Ryan, 2012: 3). Western policies, programmes and practices have brought conflicts that need to be addressed in different contexts. In the case of Oman, an important aspect in the implementation of the Vision 2020 plan has been the westernization of education practices. It is seen as a way to ensure quality. This section will show how 'westernisation' has affected the reforms in the Omani higher education, following the declaration of the objectives of Vision 2020. These reforms include: privatisation of HE, a 'Western' –inspired quality authority, affiliations with western institutions, accreditation by western institutions, importing staff and curricula, adopting English as a medium of instruction, pre-tertiary education reforms and government scholarships underpinned by a 'west is best' ideology.

Based on the extent to which Arab countries are privatizing the provision of HE at different levels and the types of private institutions being established, Buckner (2011: 23) classifies the countries' reforms into three major groups: neoliberal reforms, quality assurance reforms and imported internationalisation reforms. This classification will be used to show how the trends of internationalisation in Omani higher education have been developed following the declaration of the objectives of Vision 2020.

2.4.1 Neoliberal reforms

According to Buckner's analysis, the neoliberal reforms aim to expand access to higher education without increasing the burden on the public purse. This includes the establishment of private universities.

2.4.1.1 Privatisation of higher education

One of the key policies for the internationalisation of higher education is that concerning the changes in finance. As mentioned in the last chapter, the increasing number of students in Oman presented a huge responsibility to the government as there were increasing demands for educational services. As a result, privatization and commercialization of higher education have lately occurred. According to Lalić et al. (2012: 17), seeking alternative sources of income, a private HEI may employ some types of sources of finance such as private corporations, commercialization of research and fees of local and international students. From this, it is expected that the number of courses in a HEI will increase and therefore the market for higher education services would be more competitive.

Oman initiated neoliberal reforms over a decade ago. The number of private HEIs in Oman has started to grow since the declaration of Vision 2020. A large number of private colleges and universities have been established to accommodate the large number of secondary school graduates. In the late 1990s, there were four private colleges; however, 27 private HEIs were established by 2010 (Brandenburg, 2012: 130). These private HEIs aim to facilitate an educational reform to produce quality graduates that can transform Oman from an oil-producing economy to a modern knowledge-based economy. These private HEIs started as two-year colleges offering diplomas, then turned into four-year colleges offering degree programmes at under- and postgraduate levels.

Most of the programmes offered in these private HEIs relate directly to the labour market.

Moreover, the government has provided a set of incentives to encourage the private sector to participate in the advancement of higher education. Easy term loans, allocation of lands for construction, exemption from taxes for the first five years, have all been ways to encourage the establishment of private HEIs (Brandenburg, 2012: 122). In addition, RO 17 million were granted for Omani-owned private universities, namely: Sohar University, Dhofar University, Nizwa University, Buraimi University, and Sharqiyah University. This grant was awarded for facilities construction and for equipment related to improving the quality of education (Issan, 2016:212).

Neighbouring countries seem to have taken the same steps of expanding private HEIs, thinking that it is a way of implementing their economic plan visions. In GCC for example, as well as finance changes, anxiety about the quality of public HEIs has led policy makers to offer alternative HEIs. Since the 1990s, the private higher education sector has increased, ranging from élite branch campuses of Western universities in Qatar and UAE to independent, with external affiliations, private HEIs in Bahrain and Kuwait (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 55-56).

Although the development of private higher education has been a major national achievement, there are concerns about the quality of education provided by HEIs, particularly private HEIs. There is a growing gap in education and training in the labour market in Oman. Ameen et. Al (2010) stated that business leaders regarded the Omani workers as having inadequate educational preparation and a poor work ethic. It is a prevailing opinion that graduates of private HEIs do not meet the requirements of the labour market, as the quality is low (Al Barwani et al. 2009). Concerning this matter, Donn & Al Manthri (2010:120) also note that there is a concern that HEIs are producing

graduates qualified in a narrow range of disciplines, in computer science, engineering and business. This shows the need for highly qualified professionals and experts in the economic field.

2.4.2 Quality assurance reforms

According to Buckner (2011:23), 'quality assurance approach in higher education reforms in Arab countries' describes the initiatives by the governments to develop quality assurance programmes for all the public and private universities. In order to enhance the quality of education in higher education in Oman, a quality authority has been established and a range of measures including international affiliation agreements, international accreditation, using English as medium of instruction and importing curricula and staff has been introduced. The following sections give more details about quality assurance reforms.

2.4.2.1 A 'Western' –inspired quality authority

In order to improve the quality of Omani tertiary education, and align it to international/global values, the government in 2010 established the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), replacing the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC), which was established in 2001. The mission of the OAAA is to ensure that Omani higher education institutions meet international standards in the quality of education they provide. It seeks to lower unemployment in Oman by improving the competitiveness of Omani graduates against international applications in the Omani job market (Romano & Seeger, 2014:45).

Improving quality by establishing quality authorities is a worldwide endeavour. UAE, for example, has established the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) which is responsible for granting licensures and programme accreditation to HEIs. The Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (QAAET) in Bahrain is responsible for

evaluating all educational efforts, including general education and HEIs. There is also the Private University Council (PUC) in Kuwait. These GCC authorities have similar evaluative standards, as they are associated with the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), and are responsible for institutional effectiveness and academic quality (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 144). Oman, being a member of the INQAAHE follows recognised international standards articulated by this body. Thus, HEIs are required to evaluate their work practices and write a report. Then, external experts visit these HEIs to identify strengths and weaknesses so that their degree programmes are accredited and licensed. However, this endeavour of embracing global standards, which are closely linked to western practices and influenced by European and American cultures, may not fit the local context. These practices may not fit the culture of Oman and the traditions of its citizens. According to OAAA (2013), there is also a concern that there is no system to monitor the achievement of strategic and operational objectives against key performance indicators. There is a discrepancy of satisfaction between staff and students over the adequacy of learning resources. There is no systematic approach to the review of programmes to ensure their currency and relevance to students' needs (OAAA, 2014). Furthermore, one of the challenges that face private HEIs in Oman is that there is no definitive way to assess the quality of educational practices offered in these HEIs. The quality in each institution varies. Most of the quality audit reports produced by OAAA show that programmes offered are not contextualised to fit the Omani society (Issan, 2016:214). From this, it appears that this endeavour does not appear to serve the quality. More details will be given in the section that deals with accreditation.

2.4.2.2 Cross-border delivery of education

In conjunction with the establishment of private HEIs, the provision of cross border

higher education has been regulated by the Omani government (Brandenburg, 2012:125).

As defined by UNESCO/OECD (2005), cross- border education is:

‘...higher education that takes place in situations where the teacher, student, program, institution/provider or course materials cross national jurisdictional borders. Cross- border education may include higher education by public/private and not-for-profit/for profit providers. It encompasses a wide range of modalities in a continuum from face-to- face (taking various forms from students travelling abroad and campuses abroad) to distance learning (using a range of technologies and including e-learning)’.

This section will deal with two cross border strategies that the Omani government implemented: Academic Affiliation Agreements and government scholarships.

a. Academic affiliation agreements with western institutions

One of the key rules to start a private HE institution is the requirement of an Academic Affiliation Agreement (AAA) stating that an international institution has to play an important role in developing the degree programs offered in these private HEIs. The reason behind this regularity is to ensure that the new institution being established would follow rigorous rules and procedures developed by Western accreditation authorities (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:68). For the purposes of improving and monitoring quality, increasing the prestige of the degrees awarded by private HEIs and diversifying programme offerings, the Ministry of Higher Education encourages the investors of private higher education to choose reputable HEIs as partners in academic affiliation agreements (Issan, 2016: 212). It can be assumed that the phrase ‘reputable HEIs’ means western ones in this case. There is also a close coordination of the courses, assessment instruments and supervision of examinations. There are frequent visits of academic staff

between the two institutions as well as the development of student and faculty exchange programs.

Private HEIs differ in their focus, reflecting a particular vision for the labour market in the coming decades. Some of them offer a range of programmes in different fields of study, while others specialize in specific areas as shown in Table 2. The majority of these degrees are awarded by overseas HEIs which are located in the commonwealth countries, the US, and non-western universities such as Jordan, Lebanon and India (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:69; Brandenburg, 2012: 143).

Name and Year of Establishment	Affiliations with external institutions
Sohar University 2001	Originally University of Lincolnshire and Humbershire; presently University of Queensland
Nizwa University 2004	Fourteen Memoranda of Understanding with universities or companies. Sultan Qaboos plays important advisory role
Dhofar University 2004	American University Beirut
German University of Technology	RWTH Aachen University/ Germany
Arab Open University	Open University/ UK
Buraimi University 2003	California State University, Northridge; Ain Shams University (Egypt) Vienna University of Technology, Campus University of Vienna, The IMC University of Applied Sciences Krems/ Austria; University of Bradford/ UK
Muscat College 1996	Scottish Qualification Authority and University of Sterling
International College of Engineering and Management 1997	University of Central Lancashire
International Maritime College	The STC-Group Rotterdam/Netherlands

Majan College 1995	University of Bedfordshire and University of Leeds
Modern College of Business and Science 1997	University of Missouri, St. Louis
Caledonian College of Engineering 1998	Glasgow Caledonian University; Vellore Institute of Technology (India)
AL Buraimi College	California State University, Northridge/ USA; Ain Shams, University/ Egypt
Gulf College 2004	Staffordshire University; University of Reading; and University of Hull
Al-Zahra College for women 1999	Ahliyya Amman University (Jordan)
Scientific College for Design	Lebanese American University (Lebanon); Arab Community College (Jordan)
Middle East College for Information Technology 2002	Originally Manipal Academy of Higher Education; now Coventry University and National Records and Archive Authority, Oman
Sur University College 2001	Bond University (Australia)
Oman Management and Technology College 2004	Yarmouk University (Jordan); Philadelphia University
Mazoon College 1999	Missouri University of Science and Technology; Banasthali Vidyapeth University
Waljat Colleges of Applied Sciences 2001	Birla Institute of Technology (India)
Oman Tourism College 2001	Dublin Institute of Technology
Oman Medical College 2001	School of Medicine, West Virginia University
Oman Dental College 2006	A.B. Shetty Memorial Institute of Dental Sciences, Mangalore, India

Table 2 Private HEIs in Oman (Badry & Willoughby, 2015; Brandenburg, 2012)

The agreements between external universities and the private Omani HEIs have been classified in three categories. Table 3 lists the key methods of external affiliation agreements in Oman. Brandenburg (2012) classifies three common modes of cooperation in the range of undergraduate programmes: management contract, programme delivering and validation/articulation. In the case of the management contract, the providing university designs the programmes, recruits lecturers, appoints deans and senior management. In programme delivering, the external university provides the programme and the qualification award while teaching support is done by the Omani private HEIs. In the last category, validation, the providing university validates the quality and standard of a program developed and delivered by the Omani private HEI and qualification award. Most of the Omani institutions grant degrees conferred by other western institutions. Some of these private HEIs provide varied subjects for both bachelor and master degrees.

Types of agreements	Specific policy
Management contract	Programme delivering, degree awarding, management, consulting, faculty
Programme delivering	Degree awarding, management, consulting (local private HEI: provide teaching support)
Validation	Degree awarding, consulting (local private HEI: design of own programmes)

Table 3 Categorising external agreements (Brandenburg, 2012: 172)

The affiliation agreements of private HEIs reveals how Oman now views the internationalisation of higher education. Oman aims to benefit from foreign expertise on the basis of collaborative arrangements (Brandenburg, 2012:298). Thus, private HEIs are able to offer internationally recognized academic programmes suitable for the Omani context. Oman does not seem to give importance to international recognition and prestige. Programme mobility to provide assistance for private HEIs is the key element

of Oman internationalisation strategy. This strategy seems to meet the requirements of Oman's economy and labour market. It becomes apparent that the rationale of internationalisation in Oman is economic.

While the most talented students are admitted to public HEIs or study abroad, private HEIs, with some exceptions, are a refuge for low quality students (Brandenburg, 2012; Issan, 2016:213). A major concern is whether these students are ready to meet the academic standards of the international programmes delivered. Private HEIs operate as profit oriented institutions, thus there is no rejection of unqualified students as long as they are able to pay. Most secondary school graduates go through a one or two foundation programmes in order to prepare them for their courses. As a consequence, it takes them up to five to six years to finish their undergraduate programme. The deficit of the secondary school system (More details in section 2.2.4) affects the higher education system and the provision of cross border educational services (Brandenburg, 2012:186). Given the modern history of higher education in Oman, it can be safely concluded that the skills of the students at private higher education do not reach international standards.

Although external affiliation was set up to ensure the quality of private HEIs, there are some concerns about the quality of curricula delivered. According to Badry & Willoughby (2015:17), it appears that British institutions devote more time and resources to fulfil the affiliation agreement requirements. The degree programmes are conferred by the British partner, and in some cases Omani students spend the summer of their final year in the UK. However, there are risks with this type of arrangement. An examination of auditing reports showed the difficulty of ensuring that Omani students could do the required academic work in English (Brandenburg, 2012). Furthermore, the Omani HEIs can rarely provide and teach the imported curriculum in exactly the same manner as the

external HEI. Furthermore, one of the challenges of Omani private HEIs is the lack of local expertise in curricula development. In some cases of affiliation, some private HEIs choose to cut the cost of the external HEI so they have a chance to deliver and design the curriculum. There is a risk of a random way of designing and delivering the programmes provided, as the inexperienced locals may not do the job. This causes a concern about the quality of the academic programmes provided (Brandenburg, 2012:171). In the cases of an affiliation agreement in which the external HEIs provide the curricula, curricula may be high quality, however, these academic programmes might not fit with the local education. Most of these programmes require an ILETS score of 6.0 while studies shows that the level of English of graduates is very low. Thus there is a concern about the amount of knowledge gained form these external academic programmes.

In all cases, it is obvious that there is uncertainty about the quality of academic programmes provided in these private HEIs. It seems that curricula overlook the skills, needs and contexts that Omani students bring with them when they enter university. The textbooks or materials used are not appropriate to the Omani culture, and many topics tackle western lifestyle aspects that are irrelevant to Omani students' lives. It is therefore highly debatable, the extent to which these programmes and curricula meet the purposes of Higher Education in Oman, and to which these programmes meet the visions and missions of these private Omani HEIs.

b. Government scholarships underpinned by a 'west is best' ideology

As well as reforming pre-tertiary education, the Omani government, via the MOHE, has sought to align HE with international and global trends by awarding scholarships to both undergraduate and graduate students inside or outside Oman. These scholarships started in the early years of Oman development, after 1970, when there was not yet a national HE system. Nowadays, with the expansion of the HE system in Oman and the influence

of the 'mobility' strand in the internationalisation of higher education, great numbers are being sent to study abroad. In the academic year 2011-12, 2,700 scholarships were granted to Omani students to study different specialisation at various HEIs abroad (Badry & Willoughby, 2015).

Oman, as mentioned previously, lacks local experts and professionals and these government scholarships should provide a skilled workforce to the nation. Thus, these scholarships are being given to Oman's most talented national students. These scholarships are provided according to Oman's labour market and the needs of economic development. More importantly, these scholarships have provided the HE system with highly qualified national academics who have been educated abroad and now teach in different HEIs in Oman (Al'Abri, 2016: 194).

According to Brandenburg (2012:146), almost one-half of Omani students who received government scholarships in the past years were sent to study in the United States or the United Kingdom. Most of these students studied programmes related to commerce, business, IT and engineering. However, as part of the discourse of internationalisation of higher education, the granting of government scholarships to mainly western countries implies that the Omani HE system has adopted the 'the west is the best' ideology. The assumption is that skills based on a western style of higher education are the global skills which the policymakers want in Oman. This seems to confirm that the Omani HE system focuses on global competition rather than co-operation, stressing the economic rationale in terms of internationalising higher education. .

2.4.2.3 Accreditation by western institutions

As well as establishing a quality authority and encouraging academic affiliations, the government has also sought external programme accreditation in order to ensure quality assurance. The government has attempted to ensure quality by implementing a

regulatory system inspired by international accreditation practices. OAAA attempts to follow the procedures regulated by the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). A body of non-Omani experts visits campuses to identify strengths and weaknesses of the college or university under investigation. OAAA posts many of their reports on the official website.

Although accreditation is a way to ensure quality, evidence shows that it is not working as it has to be. In a survey study, Ross & Trevor-Roper (2015) asked twenty-nine Omani HEIs to identify if any of their programs were accredited by external accreditation bodies. Eleven of those twenty-nine HEIs, indicated that one or more of their programmes were externally accredited and nineteen HEIs have no external programme accreditation. Moreover, the response obtained indicated a lack of shared understanding of 'accreditation' and OAAA quality audit. Some HEIs thought that the external affiliate institution was the accrediting body while others thought it was OAAA. The researchers demonstrated the complexity of external accreditation across HEIs in Oman, as different professional disciplines and academic fields have different accreditation bodies. They called for a national system of programme accreditation which can insure the quality of programmes offered. It can be argued here that if providers think that the OAAA is the accrediting body, then their view of what happens in their institution might be different from the one they would have if they thought the accrediting body was external. This shows that there is a real issue and confusion related to accreditation.

2.4.2.4 Importing curricula and staff

The combination of external affiliation agreements with the adoption of international accreditation has clear implications for academic practices. These developments have meant that similar or even identical curricula have to be established.

In order to achieve higher quality levels, international experts have been invited to conduct reforms of HEIs, reforms which have radically transformed the institutions concerned. First, Arab administrators were replaced by westerners and western trained staff and faculty. Subsequently, consultants were invited to design reforms (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:112). Foreign academic staff, experts and advisors were recruited to evaluate, design and provide advice on the different aspects of the educational reforms. They were given the lead to manage the reforms, envisaged as aiming to professionalize higher education in order to prepare graduates for the labour market, with a strong focus on business, IT, engineering, health sciences and communication programmes. To achieve this goal, the curriculum was modelled on the American system and American and British textbooks were adopted. Experienced western trained faculty were hired. This approach to internationalising higher education has been the subject of criticism in the relevant literature. The obvious economic orientation is associated with commodification and commercialization of tertiary education (Beck, 2012). It has also been noted that while these shifts provide opportunities for countries to create global citizens who can help in the fast changing economic and political times, the rapid increase of ‘western’ learning contexts is considered as a challenge for those working with them (Ryan, 2012: 3). Internationalisation of teaching and learning policies, programmes and practices has brought conflicts which need to be addressed in different contexts.

Moreover, the fact that the majority of faculty are expatriates makes them ‘avoid discussing ‘sensitive issues’ for fear of being negatively labelled as not respecting local cultures and traditions (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:212). Coming from this political and religious background, governments in GCC countries seem not to foster robust debate. This shows that there is a tension between the importance of creating more critical

thinkers and problem solvers, as mentioned in most higher education documents and statements, and the fear of policy makers to train critical thinking in young generations. In the recent practices of higher education, critical thinking is at the heart of higher education across the world. Some scholars argue that critical thinking is a western concept and it is incompatible with eastern traditional beliefs (Hongladarom, 2002: 1). Others argue that critical thinking is not a uniquely western concept but that students differ in the kinds of cultural and social ideas they bring to an HEI (Bali, 2015).

According to Davidson (2009) western students are taught from an early age to evaluate and make claims about things. However, students coming from different backgrounds may 'have difficulty distinguishing between what is debatable and what is non-debatable and have difficulty discerning the writer's 'voice'' (2). This clearly shows that importing western staff and curricula into Omani higher education is incompatible with the background of Omani students' cultural and social experiences. It shows that internationalisation is misconceived. According to Beelen (2015: 62), one of the misconceptions of internationalisation is that recruiting international staff automatically leads to more internationalisation in the curriculum. Although this misconception is the case in Oman, the recruitment of faculty is a major issue confronting HEIs. Despite the high salaries, tax benefits and housing arrangements, few experienced faculty members make their way to Oman. According to Brandenburg (2012: 282), top performing academics, whose main focus is on research, do not want to enrol in overseas HEIs as they are afraid they cannot compete with scholars in the mother countries. Therefore, inexperienced faculty, at the beginning of their academic careers, is being recruited in the Omani HEIs.

According to OECD (1996), knowledge-based societies rely on highly qualified employees in all sectors of the society. There is a greater need for highly skilled

professionals who are able to use knowledge for technological and economic development. However, according to Issan (2016: 213), some HEIs employ low quality teachers with weak degrees as they do not require high salaries. Some are not qualified to teach or to develop courses and programmes to ensure quality of education. Many Omani HEIs, students and parents still believe that native speaker teachers are better than locals and teachers from other non-native English speaking countries. In addition, the appointment of faculty is contractual and usually for a period of two years, with a lack of research support and academic environment, language problems, communication and cultural issues (Issan, 2016).

2.4.2.5 English as medium of instruction

While Arabic is the official language in Oman, English is used extensively in most public and private institutions and is taught at school from an early age. Almost all signs and writings appear in both Arabic and English. It is seen as a key element for modernisation, the development of the country and the growth of the national economy. English language in Oman serves multiple purposes, including travelling to a non-Arabic speaking country, inter-lingual communication, conducting business, pursuing higher education and finding a white-collar job (Al-Issa, 2014:3-4).

English language teaching (ELT) in Oman was introduced to the Omani education system in 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said started establishing the modern Oman (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012b). Due to the replacement of the old educational system (GES), the old English curriculum, which started in 1970, has also witnessed major developments based on the government decision to revolutionize ELT to meet the present and future challenges and demands of the local and global market. A new English curriculum was introduced in Omani schools in the 1990s. English instruction, previously taught from grade four, now is taught from grade one, thus, increasing the

number of years of English language learning (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012b). Foreign experts and advisors have been recruited to evaluate, design and provide advice on the different aspects of this national reform project (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). The language curriculum has changed from a heavily content-laden teacher-centred curriculum to a learner-centered one (Wyatt, 2013:230).

A prominent misconception is that teaching English equals international education (De Wit, 2011:11). According to Beelen (2015:62), the focus on language learning as an element of, or maybe a replacement for, internationalisation remains strong. English is the medium of instruction in Oman Higher Education. English became the medium of instruction for all subjects that had value in the labour market. English is taught for general, specific and academic purposes in higher education institutions in Oman. In order to deal with the students' lack of English proficiency, many higher education universities and colleges introduced the English Foundation Program. The language centres and departments in colleges offer different English language courses to fulfil the students' needs in terms of language, as it is the medium of instruction in most HEIs. With the increasing number of programs in recent years, English for specific purposes courses have been adopted to provide students with specific English language knowledge, which relates more to their specializations and enables them to join the workplace effectively, as most companies use English as a medium of communication. Reflecting on the problems of poor English proficiency among tertiary education students, research has examined what English programs offer in terms of language skills. Previous studies have pointed to the lack of English programs in preparing Omani graduates for the workplace. Communication skills in English language seem to be neglected in higher education programs. For example, a recent study conducted by Kiranmayi (2010), investigated the efficiency of English language programmes in

providing the necessary language skills to Omani women in preparation for the workplace, offered by colleges of higher education in Oman. The results showed that these programmes were academically oriented and they lacked the required language skills needed for the workplace. In another study, Siddiqui (2014) conducted some exploratory research to analyse the current status of speaking skills in ELT at the General Foundation Programme (hereafter GFP) from nine language centres or colleges and universities in Oman. The findings showed that speaking skills were the most neglected skills in ELT and called for an equal weight of language skills in the ELT programmes in order to foster the literacy of the learner in the target language. Al-Mahrooqi (2012b) investigated, from a student perspective, how English communication skills are taught in Omani schools and some higher education institutions. The findings indicated that communication skills were not directly addressed and there were no English communication skills courses per se devoted to communication. This indicates that there is a clear lack of English programs in higher education in providing the language skills for graduates. Thus, there is a need to bridge the gap by providing the required skills for graduates.

Many educationalists have criticized the English language programmes of higher education institutes. For instance, Babrakzai (2001, cited in Al-Issa, 2006) criticizes the language activities students learn in the classroom, as they do not relate to real life situations. He also noted that the ELT courses are taught with the target of preparing students for exams. Moreover, Al-Issa (2002, cited in Al-Issa, 2005) found that the current ELT syllabus does not integrate the four skills and lacks authentic practice activities and materials. Al Husseini (2004) also pointed out that there is a dissatisfaction among stakeholders in the English programs, as these programs do not meet students' English language proficiency needs for education and workplaces.

Although GFP has been started in all HEIs to fill the existing gap between school education and university education, various studies have indicated that foundation programs contribute very little to the improvement of English language proficiency and mathematics needed for academic studies. A number of studies have been conducted to show why GFP fails to improve students' skill in English, mathematics and IT to fit them for graduate academics studies. Some suggest that the biggest challenge facing HEIs is the low level of the English language of school graduates (Al-Mamari, 2012). Some criticize the existing teaching methodology while others criticize the contents of courses as the main cause of the failure of GFP.

Al-Issa (2014) indicates that English language teaching in Oman suffers from policy and practice problems. Most of the freshmen come from local schools where the medium of instruction is mostly Arabic. This has led students to exit the system with language deficiencies. The teaching methods employed by the teachers have been restricted by the use of teacher's guides, which has had an influence on the teaching methods they have employed (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012b). Al-Mahrooqi (2012b) described the teaching methodology in the Omani schools as "formal" and students have a passive role. Al-Mahrooqi (2012a) also found that teachers are the major cause of the students' low level of English in Oman and lists 18 reasons for this. Pertinent reasons are: teachers' poor training, linguistic inadequacy, textbook-based teaching, focus on finishing the assigned syllabus, use of traditional teaching methods, teaching English through Arabic, and lack of knowledge of students' backgrounds by expatriate teachers. In addition, the syllabus prevents the students from thinking analytically and critically. Furthermore, the Omani ELT education system has been criticized for its emphasis on memorization at the expense of language processing and thinking.

In her study, Al- Mahrooqi (2014) found that students not only face difficulties in oral skills but that they also struggle in reading and writing skills, which makes them unfit for employment in many types of jobs. In a survey conducted by Sivaraman et. al. (2014), it was found that 45% of students do not completely understand a full lecture delivered in English. In the same study, it was also noted that students do not communicate their doubts and express their ideas in the classroom, due to their lack of fluency in the English language. Moreover, in a survey given to English specialized students, Al- Mahrooqi (2012a) found that 65% of participants were not proficient enough to enter the job market. Poor language proficiency seems to obstruct students from communicating in English.

As explained earlier in this chapter, Arab countries' education has been criticized as being teacher-centered. Consequently, the new changes have supported a student-centered approach to education where the learner has an active role in the learning process. This change of approach in educational practices seems to neglect the fact that teachers play a key role in this process. Wedell (2003: 10) points out that teachers' beliefs about classroom practices, the learning process, roles of teachers and students and classroom behaviors may vary. However, the transmission approach of education across the world remain usual, as explained by Wedell (2000: 112):

‘People right across society regard education as being the transmission of knowledge. Teachers have a certain amount of knowledge that they have to transmit to their students and learning is determined, can be spotted when the knowledge is tested. So the job of the teacher is to tell facts to students from primary school right the way through to university level, and for those students then to be tested on whether they have managed to retain those facts, and if they manage to reproduce what the teacher has said, they get a top mark.’

This confirms the importance of sharing any proposed educational practices with lower-level stakeholders. According to Wedell (2003: 10), there appear to be few examples in the literature of large numbers of teachers engaging in new, different practices. He identifies two reasons. The first is that the planners are unaware of the extent they require teachers to make a shift in their educational beliefs. The second is that these planners fail to consider the factors which will influence how teachers experience the new practices. The lack of such awareness can result in lack of success of most reforms (Fullan, 1991:4).

Wedell (2003: 18) criticizes the amount of time and money given to ‘language’ curriculum change projects without consideration to the teachers who, unsupported, have to deal with the introduction of the new practices in their classrooms:

‘Quite astonishing amounts of time and money have been, and continue to be, invested in trying to implement language curriculum change projects throughout the world. In many cases the changes have been introduced with minimal consideration of how the key players charged with their implementation might be supported.

Consequently over the last 20 plus years, many tens of thousands of English teachers worldwide have been expected to deal, largely unsupported, with the stress of the professional adjustments and new classroom practices implied by a new curriculum, whose objectives are based on assumptions deriving from different educational cultures. Inevitably their learners’ language classroom experiences have been affected by how easily their English teachers have been able to deal with such expectations.’

It can be argued, then, that Vision 2020 has not adequately taken into consideration real people, their backgrounds and their experiences. Thus, the introduction of the new ‘western’ practices has led to confusion. Another issue related to EMI can be attributed to the high-level stakeholders who are involved in decision making. These people have

linked English as a medium of instruction to the internationalisation of higher education, which is considered as one of the misconceptions of internationalisation. Thus, this means that these decision makers have misinterpreted the practices of internationalisation of higher education which has led to various tensions.

2.4.3 Imported internationalisation reforms

The third pattern of Higher Education reforms pursued in the GCC, following Buckner's classification, is Americanisation, where higher education systems modernize by establishing extensive international partnerships with foreign universities. Buckner (2011:24) argues that GCC governments have invited international universities to set up campuses in their countries rather than initiating quality initiatives for their local institutions.

Qatar and UAE established campuses have branded names such as Doha Education City, Sharjah University City and Dubai Knowledge Village. These campuses bring in prestigious HEIs such as the Northwestern University, Carnegie Mellon University, University of Wollongong, Heriot Watt of Scotland, Paris Sorbonne and New York University (Vardhan, 2015:7). Although Oman does not seem to follow the examples of Qatar and UAE, this model of reforming higher education apparently exists.

For example, the German University of Technology (GUTech) is an example of that. GUTech was established in 2007 following a royal decree. According to Knight (2015b: 113) this is an example of what is called a co-founded/third-generation international university. GUTech is a private Omani HEI. The primary partner in the planning of this HEI is Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule (RWTH) Aachen from Germany. RWTH is responsible for designing and delivering the programmes, which are accredited by a German quality assurance and accreditation agency. It also follows a teaching and learning approach which is based on the German Humboldt model of higher education.

GUTech, as a private Omani HEI, is accredited OAAA. As well as delivering programmes, Omani students are offered scholarships to continue graduate studies in Germany.

Different authors view this attempt of reforming higher education as far from achieving the objectives of the stated Visions in GCC. Buckner (2011:24) argues that these American-style HEIs do not seem to aim to educate GCC students for a Knowledge Economy but rather to bring international acclaim and prestige to the GCC. Another opinion, by Al-Semary et. al (2012, cited in Vardhan, 2015:7) views GCC in their attempt to internationalize their Higher Education as countries that are ‘anxious to promote education as a symbol of modernity to their population as well as to the foreign countries’. This leads a questioning of the real drive of GCC policy makers for the internationalisation of higher education in the region. More details will be given later in this chapter about policy makers and their influence in higher education.

2.4.4 Pre-tertiary education reforms

Following the government’s acknowledgement of the need to prepare qualified workforce for the new era, in ways which will help the growth of the economy and align with the new global changes and challenges, and the general plan to improve the quality of education, many changes in the educational system in Oman have been made. The pre-university education system, suffering from serious problems, represents one of the changes. One of the main reasons behind HE institutions’ weak outputs is attributed to the weak inputs in their student intake. Most freshmen entering universities are not well prepared for university studies. They lack language proficiency, study skills, time management, critical thinking and analytical skills. This situation has led to pre-university reforms.

In order to tackle the challenges of globalization and Omanization, the following educational policies were recommended in vision 2020:

‘Implement and improve the standards of Basic Education, make secondary education more consistent with the requirements of the future society, pay more attention to scientific subjects, introduce the teaching of computing in schools as a basic subject, improve the teaching/learning of the English language in BE, provide schools with adequate human resources and educational equipment, improve the status of teachers, improve in-service training courses and workshops for all staff in the educational field, improve teaching methods and education practices according to new trends and encourage the concept of learning by doing’ (Almamari, 2009: 18).

Considering these education policies, it can be concluded that globalization has seriously affected the education policy of Oman. In order to see this influence, the Basic Education System (BES) is explored.

The replacement of the old General Education (GE), which was completely phased out in June 2010 across the Sultanate, with the new Basic Education (BE), was a step towards the development the development of education programmes. Addressing the requirements of the labour market and the need to expand the Omanization policy, the World Bank (1999: 56) states that ‘Building on the BER (Basic Education Reform), secondary curricula should be developed to improve the quality of higher education entrants – particularly in problem solving skills and English language proficiency – thus alleviating the need for a foundation year. Furthermore, those secondary school graduates who are not admitted to higher education should also have acquired skills in areas such as communication and information technology to increase their chances of employment’.

The BES started to address the educational requirements of the future job market in terms of English language and generic skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. According to the International Report on Quality Education in Oman, ‘the basic education curriculum comes into existence as a reply to the urgent need to reform the old general education to be more relevant to the society and to fit the rapid changes in the 21st century. The aim of this new curriculum is to provide students with real life situations’ (Ministry of Education, 2004: 15-16). In terms of tests, the Ministry of Education (MOE) uses the Trends in International Mathematics and science Study (TIMSS) to test the mathematics and science achievement of Omani students and compare their achievements on a global scale. This allows the MOE to have reliable data to assess Oman’s comparative global competitiveness (Herzi, 2011:11). With this point in mind, there is no doubt that education policies including teaching English, using technology, life and work skills, curriculum and testing are in response to pressures of globalisation and Omanization.

Despite the reforms made in the school educational system in the past years, the quality of education in Oman seems still to be inadequate when seen in an international/global context and students do not have the required skills to meet the current demands of the country (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al Shmeli, 2009; Gonzalez, 2008; Romano & Seeger, 2014). In a study conducted by Al-Maskri et al. (2012) to find out whether the school curriculum is a well-rounded set of educational courses, whether it addresses the latest issues in the world and whether it prepares students for the job market, four higher education lecturers were interviewed. The finding showed that the school curriculum faces a major problem in its application in the schools and it does not satisfy society’s needs, as it does not reflect real life situations. It was recommended that there is a need to improve the current curriculum and to shift from the theoretical curriculum to a

practical one. The authors pointed out that curriculum should include components such as problem solving, critical thinking, communication skills and topics which prepare students for the job market and for their future.

However, it can be argued that it is not surprising that students are still not up to the required level. The ideas and practices such as critical thinking, English skills, analytical skills and learner-centeredness, which were introduced in the BES, are western. As this thesis argued earlier, 'western' learning contexts are considered as a challenge for people who work with them and has brought conflicts in real practices.

It is worth mentioning that due to the weak inputs from secondary school, the General Foundation Program (GFP) was introduced in 2007. The government decided that students in all higher education institutes must attend the GFP as a compulsory entrance qualification for degree programs for six to twelve months. In this program, students study English Language, Maths, Computing and General Study Skills, as these four areas provide an important base relevant to all further study, and to the development of broad thinking and life skills in general (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012)

2.4 Current issues in Omani higher education

With all these developments in higher education in Oman, the literature, as mentioned above, shows that the recent higher education reforms have a number of issues that cause many conflicts and tensions. These issues are grouped in three categories and comprise the dominance of high stakeholders in decision-making, the influence of westernization of higher education and the dominance of a market-led view of higher education. The next sections highlight these issues in detail.

2.4.1 'Magistracy of Influence'

The first issue that causes conflicts in higher education is the dominance of high-level stakeholders. Blaming the 'magistracy' of key players in Oman, Donn & Al Manthri

(2010: 121) assert that the discourse on internationalisation is dominated by a small group of stakeholders: higher education leaders, governments and international bodies. These high-level stakeholders have enforced a certain view for education, supporting the relationship between education and the labour market and adopting western practices. In a study conducted about Omani higher education, Donn & Al Manthri (2010:121) found that these policy makers influence the decisions without considering other stakeholders. They argue that these key people, who have travelled to other countries, make the decisions set agendas, deliver products and make recommendations through different international conferences and policy-making conventions. These agendas may, or may not, be to the benefit of an individual region. These key players have created a form of 'Macdonaldisation' of higher education (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010:156). Other stakeholders, such as employers, faculty and the students, who should benefit from the implementation of this discourse, have less participation.

Concerning this gap, scholars appear to support the idea that the internationalisation of higher education has given emphasis to organizations rather to individuals. Sanderson (2007:276) and (2011:661), for example, provides a new perspective on the internationalisation of higher education at the level of individuals. This perspective is in response to the limitation of contemporary definitions and conceptions of internationalisation concerning faculty in higher education, in terms of their knowledge and skills when working with internationalized curricula, and their personal and professional attitudes. He argues that Knight's definition of the internationalisation of higher education, as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' is limited. According to him, the three levels (international, intercultural and the global dimension) are limited and he suggests a 'within institution' level which includes the

faculty/department level and the individual level, to be added. Although Sanderson agrees that the view of practical work has been mentioned in the literature of internationalisation through academic development and staff training, he also points out that there is no theoretical underpinning to support the internationalisation of an individual personal and professional outlook. Sanderson constructs a framework that 'introduces a humanistic and existential appreciation of suitable internationalisation responses to current global processes'. This framework acts 'as a foundation for individual teachers in terms of internationalizing their personal and professional outlook'. The idea of the internationalized teacher in higher education is supported by the notion of 'authenticity'; 'understanding self' and the notion of 'cosmopolitanism'; 'a citizen of the world'. This framework supports the importance of sharing decisions with low-level stakeholders when dealing with internationalised curricula.

The 'Magistracy' of key players has played an important role in higher education reforms in Oman. However, there is lack of sharing of ideas between the high-level stakeholders and the low-level stakeholders in higher education. Consequently, it is unlikely to succeed if the expected outcomes are not in harmony with classroom practices, as conflicts and tension may arise. The approach of policy makers by simply adopting ideas and practices from Western countries does not seem to be working. Students are not graduating with adequate skills, The Omani literature shows that graduates are not meeting the stated vision and employers and stakeholders are not satisfied with HE outputs, employers are not satisfied with graduates' level, importing staff is not working, people do not understand accreditation, and affiliation is not working. This shows that the implementation of different internationalization strategies has not been working according to the intentions.

2.4.2 The influence of ‘Westernization’

The second issue that causes tensions in the recent development of higher education is the influence of ‘westernisation’. The move to westernizing higher education in Oman appears to be posited on the notion that 'Western' describes ‘a uniform approach to teaching and learning embracing critical thinking and independent work, to create well-educated and democratic members of society’ (Vinther & Slethaug (2013). Many scholars go with the assumption that ‘western’ is a single rubric. This is far from the case, as is made clear in Vinther & Sleuthaug (2013:799), who show, for example, how in Northern and Southern Europe, practices and ethos are substantially different.

In written and oral surveys at a Danish university, as reported by Vinther & Slethaug (2013: 799), students from France and Spain noted that, unlike Denmark, classroom discussion and group work among students is not usual in their home countries. The dominance and authority of teachers are higher. According to the authors, a Danish higher education classroom is informed by tacit values where both teachers and students should have independence and autonomy in their pursuit of knowledge and educational goals. This view can be traced to the late eighteenth century view of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is based on ‘independent thinking to develop an educated person who could contribute freely to the new knowledge, democratic ideals and civic society that was forming in the wake of the Enlightenment’ (799-800). It is based on reason, research and the independence of science. ‘It is a qualification for autonomy, for freedom for individual thought, and for individual moral decisions’, as As Klafki (2000: 87) remarks. Thus, an individual educated in this way will ‘become well informed and cultured, independent in life and able to construct and live by important educational, social and spiritual values. To accomplish this, institutions of higher learning needed to integrate these values at all levels’ (Ibid). The question arises whether the Omani higher education, with its current

‘imported’ teaching and learning practices, is considering what it takes to construct autonomous and independent individuals in their local environment.

Taking another example from Europe, a study by Ozga et al. (2011) about the attitudes of teachers of five northern countries in Europe: England, Finland, Scotland, Sweden and Denmark, found that there were significant differences in teachers’ perceptions of the most important qualities in education. Danish teachers preferred students who become democratically formed and who are involved in their own learning. In contrast, Scottish and Finnish teachers emphasized the importance of skills acquisition. Apparently, both of these teachers’ perceptions have been criticized by European authors.

In the UK, for example, the concepts of independence and autonomy in the higher education system have been criticized. Leathwood and O’Connell (2003: 599) claimed that the desire for independence is linked to ‘masculinist conceptions of the individual, with this learner constructed as male, white, middle class and able bodied’. Implications followed up this claim noting that the discourse of development from dependence to independence and the insistence on individualism, self-confidence and self-reliance are drawn from the New Right in the UK, following similar grounds of American neo-liberal thinking (Leathwood, 2006, as cited in Vinther & Slethaug (2013: 801). Leathwood (2006) finds that these discourses ‘not only comprise an idealised ‘critical consciousness’ of the classroom but also the ‘politicised mantra’ of elite in the UK who use it to cut educational budgets’.

Vinther & Slethaug go on to criticize the skills orientation common in western Higher Education and exemplified by the CEFR (ibid:803). They contrast this approach with the older tradition of humanistic Higher Education, where the teachers had the freedom to decide the methodology, content and pedagogy and where their views on the assessment for knowledge and courses were given voice. This philosophy allows independence and

autonomy for both teachers and students in their production of knowledge.

It may be hypothesized, then, that in Omani Higher Education, there may be considerable resistance to the westernizing process or, indeed, confusion as to how the process fits over a pre-existing, different model. The challenges referred to by Ryan (2013:3) may consist of understanding which model of western Higher Education is intended and how the model may work in the Omani context. Some stakeholders in Omani Higher Education may be doubtful, skeptical even of the benefits of an economic orientation to their work or may simply decide to continue in ways familiar to them. Some members of the teaching staff may blindly apply a 'skills' approach to their classroom work, without understanding how this fits their particular context or the extent to which it corresponds to their students' needs and expectations.

The discourse on national and institutional levels is given more attention than the attention given to the programmes themselves. Research, curricula, teaching and learning processes, which should be the core of internationalisation, receive little attention (De Wit, 2015:14). Although Oman, in the recent reforms, places a great emphasis on quality of programmes, as shown in previous sections, there is little attention to the relevance to the students of imported programmes. Implementing the internationalisation of higher education by importing from western educational contexts is a dilemma in several aspects. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the secondary school leavers have low standards, so they face difficulties in meeting the requirements of the western programmes in higher education. Moreover, low-level students are admitted to private HEIs where English is the language of instruction. In addition, less qualified teachers and low quality facilities in some HEIs make it difficult for Omani students to meet the required standards. According to one of the recent debates, one of the main challenges of teaching and learning for international students, whether those

who study academic programmes of another country either in that country or their own countries, is the nature of the curriculum and pedagogy for students and faculty in the different changing contexts.

It appears that importing diverse practices and philosophies, even if they help to some extent, does not mean the quality of education is better nor a solution. In western countries, the industrial revolution has resulted in great scientific, economic and technological progress in the past hundred years. However, 'it has proved unwise for other countries to copy western practices and to evaluate everything by western criteria' (OECD, 2000: 103). The European examples, above, show that no higher education system is immune from conflicts and confusions.

In this view, if internationalisation is to be adopted, it should not be equal to westernization. According to De Wit, it is one of the misconceptions of internationalisation. Jane Knight (2012:1) also notes that 'internationalization is intended to complement, harmonize, and extend the local dimension – not to dominate it'. She points out that 'if this truth is not respected, a backlash will exist and internationalization will lose its true worth'. If the Omani government is taking westernization as a key to implementing vision 2020, the literature shows that it is not a wise step in the recent developments occurring in higher education. It appears that there is a great deal of confusion and tensions and, in examining the practice of westernisation, there is need to find out what individuals actually think.

2.4.3 The dominance of market-led view

As this thesis highlights, concerns arise when one rationale becomes prioritized over another. The adoption of the market rationale at the expense of others has found challenges in Omani higher education. The cultural and social rationale for internationalisation is currently given less importance and yet the preservation and

promotion of national culture, and the acknowledgment of cultural and ethnic diversity within and between countries, are strong reasons to internationalize.

Oman, along with many countries around the world, has chosen to internationalize its higher education curriculum and teaching and learning practices to face local and global challenges. As noted earlier in this chapter, globalisation has influenced the need to 'internationalize' teaching and learning practices in higher education. However, the literature warns against the overemphasis on market-oriented approaches. Such approaches associated with the construction of knowledge economies can create new identities and roles of people (Welikala, 2011: 24).

The current purpose of higher education provision in Oman has been changed as the Omani higher education system is being redirected away from nation-building objectives towards human resource development. Education is seen as a form of economic investment.

As argued earlier in this chapter, Oman, within the ownership of the 'magistracy' of key players, has moved towards the market-led view of education. At the same time, the human interests as another vision of education have been 'eclipsed' (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010: 122). Faculty and administration in GCC countries have expressed their concerns about the great pressure to produce a highly skilled workforce to enter the job market and the small time allocation given to humanistic education (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:212). Thus, higher education reforms in GCC are missing out on using a humanistic education that can create critical thinkers, who can construct their national identities.

Furthermore, higher education in GCC might have deliberately given less attention to humanistic education. Badry and Willington (2015:212) explain that offering an education that challenges local cultures and traditions is considered a 'sensitive route'

that HEIs must negotiate. This shows that policy makers run against time to produce highly skilled graduates who speak English while linking internationalisation to westernization. These policy makers seem to neglect the fact that internationalization's first priority, unlike globalisation, is human interest (Yang, 2002: 92). According to Yang (2002: 85-88), through taking a critical position about cultures, HEIs should be a substantial place of social and cultural development, helping people understand what is happening in their lives, so they can respond to the changed social, political and economic conditions in the modern world.

It is obvious that work related skills are important for graduates to be technically competent, however, lacking skills such as critical thinking will not enable them to contribute to innovation and research. This could eventually present issues for social and economic development. James Coffman (1996:2) draws attention to the problem with this labour market approach to higher education:

‘The issue that receives the most attention today throughout the Arab world is that strengthening the link between university studies and the need of the job market. It is recognized everywhere that the university has not been producing graduates with skills needed by the economy – hence the growing problem of ‘educated unemployment’. So, the outputs of higher education continue to lack skills needed for the labour market. This leads to question whether the curriculum is appropriate for the region. The importation of curriculum, even if it is of the highest quality in home countries, does not necessarily serve the interest of higher education in Oman’ (11-12).

To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is no evidence whether higher education policy makers are aware of how the curriculum is designed in HEIs.

Omani higher education is facing cultural conflicts and challenges when it comes to educational practices related to the internationalisation of higher education. This reflects

the conflict of Vision 2020's objective to preserve the Omani Arab culture within the practices demanded by the internationalisation of higher education. The preservation of the Arab, Islamic cultural identity should be central to Omani higher education practices. In its constitution and Vision 2020, Oman shows that it aspires to become a knowledge society and attain great economic development. It affirms its belonging to the Arab nation, linked to its history and cultural heritage through language and religion. It also declares Arabic as its official language. The following are some of the themes that are relevant to this study as articulated by the Omani government in its vision 2020:

1. Culture and Arabic language
2. Strength from the traditions
3. Human capital by maximizing the participation of Omanis, nurturing the public sector (Badry & Willoughby, 2015)

As shown in the previous sections, the government has placed an important emphasis on quality of educational practices offered in HEIs. Policies such as accreditation, quality assurance and external affiliations have been introduced to ensure quality of education. This has resulted in westernization of educational practices by importing programmes, staff, faculty, standards and English as a medium of instruction. In addition, the international affiliation agreements have led to sharing ideas in curriculum design and market orientation. The higher education system in Oman cannot be isolated from these global influences in terms of educational practices. However, the recent practices of higher education seem to imply copying concepts and values from western cultures and neglecting the national culture. While these practices are not necessarily wholly negative or positive, many of them conflict with national values, which are important to preserve traditional culture, language and religion. This could lead to ignoring the duty of education as specified in Vision 2020.

With the support of technology and globalisation, people are confronted with a social and cultural derangement (Yang, 2002: 87) as traditions can lose power fast. This presents a dilemma in the higher education field. Traditionally education has committed to humanitarian principles and critical thinking even when vocational training was introduced (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010:94). Donn & Al Manthri (2010:94) question whether the marginalization of these previous principles and the new emerging practices are beneficial for the future development in the GCC region including Oman. They note that it is new that one set of rationales of higher education is being promulgated at the expense of others. In a study conducted by Badry & Willoughby (2015: 211), various executives of major universities in GCC acknowledged that HEIs do not handle their grounding in local Arab culture and environment.

It can be argued that despite the official decisions affirming the preservation of Arabic language and Arabic culture as central components for national identity, the current HE practices show a different path. Instead of having a national educational policy that guarantees its citizens the right to learn to critically and evaluate their heritage, the current policy to construct a national identity is frustrated by the importation of educational systems, curricula and academic workers.

The recent reforms presume that educational reforms do not affect the Arab-Islamic identity. Standard Arabic (SA), the official language of the 22 Arab countries, is nobody's mother tongue, as each Arab state has a dialectal, spoken Arabic (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:179). Due to the rapid socio-economic transformations, the linguistic context is challenging in the GCC countries. Different studies reveal that the proficiency of SA has declined among young generations. Badry (2015) notes that millennial generations have weak Arabic skills and hold negative perceptions about SA as a useful

language for the labour market and knowledge society. This has even led to calls for a law to protect the mother tongue (Badry & Willoughby, 2015).

The dominance of English language in the recent reforms does not seem to respond to these concerns. Although Oman maintains Arabic in the pre-tertiary education, English is adopted as the medium of instruction across public and private HEIs. Moreover, parents support the idea of preparing their children in English, as it is the language of the global market. Unfortunately, educated young Arabs admit to having low writing proficiency in SA and prefer to communicate in English language in formal contexts (Badry, 2011). For some it is fashionable to admit their weakness in Arabic skills and it suggests that the person is modern and has a western education (Badry & Willoughby, 2015: 188). Furthermore, Arabic language is considered as outdated and associated with rote learning that does not promote the critical thinking and inquiry needed for the new era (Ibid: 190). This shows that the weakened status of SA in education is a result of globalisation pressures and also social pressures. Moreover, this might show that Vision 2020 objectives are not shared with the public or that they just ignore it.

In support of national educational practices and philosophies, Vinther & Slethaug (2013: 802) point out that national educational philosophies used to find expression in content, teaching methods, testing and assessment before the advent of internationalisation. They state that ‘in theory at least, there was a national purpose and coherence among them, with teachers granted the trust of the educational system to provide valid methods of assessment to ensure quality and fairness. Breaking this connection would breach the social contract between policy-makers, teachers, students and society at large.’ This national imperative is being challenged by an increasingly international agenda. They argue that being away from national pedagogy ‘might well alter the coherence between teaching, pedagogy and the ideals of autonomy and social involvement’ (Ibid: 802).

Supporting the traditional way of teaching, they maintain ‘the teacher as resource of knowledge of content, students and appropriate assessment methods based on national consensus might become a thing of the past, diminishing autonomy of both students and teachers. The socio-cultural conversation might become deprived of its meaningfulness, not allowing students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships.’

According to them, this might ruin students’ ability to face situations in their learning and their life. They might be less equipped and less confident to participate in discussions of society. ‘The pressures of internationalisation make it paramount that each national educational hierarchy responds with an examination and deliberation of its own values and priorities in order to decide where to incorporate and adapt to external forces and where to insist on renewal from a firm stand on one’s heritage’ (Ibid: 804).

The appreciation of ‘home’ and ‘traditional’ values can highly serve a strong higher education system. Although the mobility of faculty, students and researchers have benefited HEIs, ‘western’ socio-economic values and pragmatism must not be allowed to swamp national pedagogical and institutional values (Vinther & Slethaug, 2013: 807).

Vinther & Slethaug (2013) call for a debate about what values are and how to blend internationalisation. With these values, higher education can ‘either demonstrate internationalisation with local characteristics or local higher education with international characteristics’ (807). If the literature shows these conflicts and controversial views are within ‘western’ countries, themselves, then what of the conflicts in the eastern countries, particularly the Middle East? Countries in the Middle East tend to import ‘western’ educational practices in their higher education systems.

The importance of individual humanistic transformation is reflected in the work of Beelen and Jones (2015). Beelen and Jones (2015) address this key issue by proposing a

learner-centered definition of internationalisation, where the individual learner is given centrality to the transformation rather than placing the activities of an organisation in the central position. The definition proposed is:

‘Internationalisation of higher education constitutes the provision of an environment containing such elements that a learner is given the opportunity to attain achieved learning outcomes with international awareness and intercultural competence.’

The proposed definition is seen in the context of a chain of situations. In this chain, the learner is the constant, who connects the various elements of the chain. Once students finish secondary school, they join HEIs in which they undergo a teaching and learning process that is to further their transformation. The aim of this transformation is to make them ready for the next link in the chain and to instill a desire for lifelong learning. This definition indicates that under any government or in any HEI looking for long-term educational reforms/system, the learner should be the center of any educational way of thinking. This definition also confirms that programmes and curricula should link the stages of the individual’s development from primary education until his/her life of work. In order to see the conflict among stakeholders of higher educational practices in GCC countries, including Oman, Badry & Willoughby (2015: 211) interviewed various executives of major universities in the region. Different perspectives have been found. Some interviewees found that the focus on professional education in higher education is a priority and that students’ competencies in English and other study skills should be targeted in order to find solutions to local market problems. Other interviewees acknowledged that HEIs do not handle their grounding in local Arab culture and environment.

As an important objective in Vision 2020, Omani HEIs have to consider how to preserve and develop traditional Omani, Arab culture and how to absorb and make use of foreign culture in the discourse of internationalisation of higher education. This could lead to a localization of the practices of internationalisation of higher education. By its very nature, the internationalisation of higher education leads to the introduction of another culture. With the new technological progress, western culture is rapidly spreading all around the world. As the OECD (2000:107) asserts, Western culture and local cultures have different values and different philosophical bases as they originated in different environments. There will be divergence when they interact. However, if internationalisation is not adapted towards alignment with traditional values and systems, these will inevitably fade or disappear. Market driven internationalisation creates opportunities for Oman, however, the apparent focus on market values is of concern and it challenges essential values of Omani society. The tendency for commodification and marketization, as observed by many scholars, has changed the society and has brought tension.

Despite some of the problematic issues related to the internationalisation and westernization of higher education in Oman, HEIs can positively make use of internationalized and westernized educational practices. The standards of international accreditation, when appropriate to the national educational goals, can provide a useful roadmap for local HEIs. Policymakers can develop ideas to improve programmes and practices in higher education. They can also get support and feedback from authorities which have more experience in developing the standards of international accreditation.

Policymakers bring ‘western’ educational practices to the Omani HE with the idea that they can “cut and paste” their model of education into the country, only to discover that it does not work that way. ‘Western’ practices can help the development of education if

applied appropriately. According to Mrabet (2010), adopting a 'western-style' education gives GCC students the opportunity to gain some perspective on western culture which helps to bridge the gaps of understanding. Such cross-cultural understanding is seen as key in helping solve some of the social and political conflicts between the West and the Arab world. As stated earlier in this chapter, the Arabic language is in danger because of the excessive use of English in education. However, the use of English does not have to be the major challenge as long as Arabic can find its place in knowledge construction (Badry & Willoughby, 2015:197). There is no doubt that English is the language of communication internationally and it is required in the labor market. Mrabet (2010) also points out that not all change in the GCC is due to 'western' education: much of it is the direct result of extensive exposure to western lifestyles via the media.

In order to get the best use of international and western educational programs and practices, these need be modified, tailored, and adapted to the local context. Thus, HEIs should revise their current plan or strategy and use practical and feasible programmes. This can be done by revising textbooks and programmes according to society's needs and strengthening the quality of research and teaching. Omani HEIs need to make a robust effort to promote internationalization and best educational practices.

2.5 Conclusion

Considering the relatively short history of Oman's higher education, the government has evidently made significant advancement in the internationalisation of higher education. However, the progress may not look as substantial when it comes to the concern of the local dimension. The literature shows that the higher education system in its current position struggles to state clearly the Omani government's understanding of internationalisation. Due to the nature of higher education reforms, there remain

unresolved tensions concerning the provision of higher education. To the best knowledge of the researcher, there is little or no empirical evidence of how these tensions might be played out 'on the ground' among people who are currently involved in higher education in Oman, how these reforms are viewed and how these reforms are affecting the provision in higher education. It is evident that there is the possibility of confusion at the thinking level. Moreover, it is clear that the current practices may not align with the goal of higher education, because of the contradictory views within vision 2020. One good way of exploring this muddled confusion is by consulting the real stakeholders in the process. Beck (2012: 143) states that in order to align the practices of internationalisation with desirable educational outcomes, rich discussion on the 'tensions among locale, location, and (dis)location' need to be considered. The next chapter will provide a detailed discussion of the methodological approach.

Chapter Three: The Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As has been discussed in the literature review chapter, it is evident that the Omani higher education system in its current position struggles to state clearly the Omani government's understanding of internationalisation. Due to the nature of higher education reforms, there remain unresolved tensions concerning the provision of higher education. In order to examine these tensions, there is seemingly, a need to consult higher education stakeholders who are involved in the process. Thus, this research requires a research design that is appropriate to explore these tensions. This chapter discusses and justifies the design of the current research. Beginning with an overview of the interpretive qualitative approach used for this study and the ontology and the epistemology that have informed it. Following this, the theoretical framework used for the analysis is explained and justified. The chapter goes on to detail the process of this research. This includes explaining and justifying the selection of participants and setting, the selection of methods used for data collection and the process of data analysis. Finally, trustworthiness issues are addressed in order to assess the findings of this study.

3.2 Research design fundamentals

In order to understand the nature of any social research, it is important to identify and justify its philosophical assumptions in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology (Cohen et. al, 2011:5). While the assumptions of ontology are concerned with the nature of social reality, the epistemological assumptions are concerned with how the reality is known and how communicated to others (Cohen et. al, 2011: 6). Both ontology and epistemology have direct implications for the methodological concerns of the researcher (Ibid). There are two dominant ontological and epistemological paradigms: positivism and interpretivism.

The positivist ontology believes that there is a single objective reality to any research phenomenon that exists in the world (Creswell, 2014: 7). There is no consideration given to the beliefs and perspectives of the researcher. Thus, researchers in this paradigm prefer more of quantitative research over qualitative research (Rubin, 2012: 19) and use quantitative methods such as questionnaires, surveys and statistics. The focus of these quantitative methods is to get an overview of a particular context and to reveal social trends. Positivist researchers take a structural research approach by identifying a clear research topic and adopting suitable methods. The emphasis is in the patterns of trends of that context rather than individuals. Positivist researchers assume that data can be collected independently of the social perspective of the researcher (Rubin, 2011:19).

Objectivity is an important aspect in this paradigm (Creswell, 2014: 8). Positivists seek to develop true and relevant statements that serve to explain the phenomena of concern (Ibid). They tend to separate meanings from facts (Guba, 1990: 22). They use logical, deterministic and cause-and-effect oriented approaches to research (Creswell, 2007: 20). In comparison to positivism, the interpretive paradigm holds different assumptions. Interpretivism is 'the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context' (Crotty, 1998: 42). According to Merriam (2009: 23), 'meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting'. Unlike positivism, this research paradigm rejects the possibility of making research value-free and objective (Carcary, 2009:12). This view suggests that there is no single objective reality. According to Creswell (2007), interpretivists assume that there are multiple realities dependent on human practices and interactions. These realities are

constructed and interpreted differently by the researcher and the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005:20). Therefore, the researcher and the participants construct meaning together.

In an attempt to make meaning in this research of how stakeholders' perceive the higher education curriculum, a basic interpretive qualitative approach was employed (Merriam, 2002, Crotty, 1998). Interpretive qualitative research allows researchers to understand and interpret how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds and what meaning they give to their experiences (Merriam, 2002). Table 1.3 displays the characteristics of interpretivism research design as applied to this project.

Feature	Description
Purpose of research	Understand and interpret higher education stakeholders' perspectives on possible contradictory/confusing strands within Vision 2020
Ontology (The nature of reality)	There are multiple realities. There is no single objective reality: Higher education's stakeholders have different perspectives about the curriculum. Their perspectives are contingent upon their practices, and constructed through interacting in the field. Their perspectives are subjective and vary depending on their interpretations, experiences, views and knowledge.
Epistemology (How reality is known)	Event is understood through 'perceived' knowledge by experiencing the real life or natural settings Interactive mode of data collection.
Methodology (The process of studying reality)	Role of the researcher The researcher wants to experience what is being studied, allow feeling to govern actions Interpretation is based on engagements with participants and reflections upon the transcripts Methods used by researcher: Qualitative

Table 4 Characteristics of interpretivism

For this study, the interpretive qualitative approach facilitates the ability to participate in the process of collecting data. It also helps to provide a rich descriptive account of stakeholders' views of a higher education curriculum which would lead to highlighting possible contradictions and tensions (Merriam, 2009). By using this research approach, it

should be possible to make meaning of the world in which the stakeholders work. Following Merriam (2002), 'the overall interpretation will be the researcher's understanding... of the participants' understanding of the phenomenon of interest.' Thus, the researcher is not perceived as being entirely objective rather as being part of the process (Carcary, 2009:12). Welsham (2006:325) 'the researcher's best tool for analysis is his or her mind, supplemented by the minds of others when work and ideas are exposed to them'. This study required the researcher to interpret the perceptions and opinions of the participants based on her engagements with the participants and reflections upon the transcripts of interviews. This involved the researcher recognizing the areas of tensions among stakeholders. In summary, the basic interpretive qualitative approach best supports this study because it allows the interpretation of the stakeholders' experiences in higher education.

In order to interpret stakeholders' views and beliefs, a philosophical framework was used. This framework highlights three curriculum philosophies which potentially conflict with each other. As this research aims to explore the muddled confusion and tension in higher education in Oman, the following sections explain the process used to achieve the findings.

3.3 Establishing a conceptual framework for analysis of English language curriculum

3.3.1 Defining curriculum

As this research focuses on language curriculum, it was necessary to define 'curriculum'. The term 'curriculum' is arguably susceptible to one of the most debated definitions in the field of education, judging from the range of definitions in the relevant literature. Currently, there is still no widely accepted definition for the term and the meaning varies depending on the context of a particular study (Connelly & Lantz, 1991). Further, there have been arguments about narrowing or widening the term 'curriculum'. Historically, it

has been referred to as ‘a course of subject matter studies’ (Kelly, 2009:9). Later, the definition has expanded to mean either ‘a general overall plan of the content or specific materials of instruction’, ‘the planned and guided learning experiences and intended learning outcomes’ or ‘a methodological inquiry exploring the range of ways in which the subject matter elements of teacher, student, subject and milieu can be seen’ (Good, 1959; Tanner and Tanner, 1975, Westbury and Steimer, 1971, quoted in Connelly and Lantz, 1991).

According to Lawton (1983), the concept of curriculum can be placed on a continuum. A narrow definition at one end, which includes specific content, and a broad one at the other, which includes the whole educational experience. This can be illustrated in a linear conceptualization of curriculum as follows:



Figure 2 A linear conceptualisation of curriculum

The narrow definition within a continuum sees curriculum as ‘a course of subject matter studies’ (Connelly & Lantz, 1991). However, this definition has been criticized by Kelly (2009) for being limited. He argues:

‘Any definition of curriculum, if it is to be practically effective and productive, must offer much more than a statement about the knowledge-content or merely the subjects which schooling is to ‘teach’ or transmit. It must go far beyond this to an explanation, and indeed a justification, of the purposes of such transmission and an exploration of the effects that exposure to such knowledge and such subjects is likely to have, or is intended to have, on its recipients – indeed it is from these deeper concerns...that any curriculum planning worthy of the name must start’ (9).

A broader definition of curriculum, in contrast, should involve four important dimensions of educational planning and practice (Kelly, 2009:13). These dimensions are 1. the intentions of planners; 2. the procedures adopted for the implementation of those intentions; 3. the actual experiences of pupils resulting from the teachers' direct attempts to carry out the planners' intentions, and; 4. the 'hidden' learning that occurs as a by-product of the organization of the curriculum (13). He defines curriculum as 'the totality of the experiences the pupil has as a result of the provisions made' (13). This definition of curriculum seems very broad and gives curriculum designers a great responsibility for all learners' learning experiences.

Another definition is offered by Stenhouse (1975), who suggests that curriculum is '...an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice' (5). In this definition, curriculum is viewed as a proposal which links principles into actual practice. This proposal (curriculum) is seen as a process which can be reviewed and adjusted in order to enhance learning. Kelly's and Stenhouse's definitions offer a starting point in curriculum design.

The term 'curriculum' in language education studies has a variety of definitions. In a narrow sense, it means 'syllabus', i.e. a list of what is to be learnt and taught. However, this definition has been modified to include a wider meaning. According to Christison & Murray (2014), 'a curriculum is not a static set of documents, nor is it a list of things to be taught; it's a reiterative, dynamic process, one that is constantly being planned, implemented, and evaluated' (p.4). Similarly, Finney (2002) refers to 'curriculum' as 'all aspects of the planning, implementation and evaluation of an educational programme, the why, how and how well together with the what of the teaching-learning process' (70). In other words, a curriculum is not simply the content of a programme and

what is to be learnt and taught; a curriculum includes planning, implementation and evaluation of an educational programme.

As highlighted in the previous chapters, the main objectives of higher education in Oman are the production of human resources in people who have therefore the required skills (personal and social) and who are ready to take the responsibility to serve the Omani society. Thus, educational practices should promote these personal and social values in order to provide students with the appropriate learning experiences. The focus of this study is to understand and interpret higher education stakeholders' perspectives on possible contradictory/confusing strands within vision 2020. Exploring and analysing these strands will uncover the values which govern the ELT curriculum. Therefore, for a working definition, Kelly's (2009) term of a 'total curriculum' which emphasizes the total educational experiences of learners will be used. He argues that,

‘...some of the inadequacies of previous attempts at curriculum planning can be attributed to the fact that it has tended to proceed in a rather piecemeal way within subjects rather than according to any overall rationale. This dimension of curriculum development is, of course, important, but it is the rationale of the total curriculum that must have priority. ...At the very least, the total curriculum must be accorded prior consideration, and a major task that currently faces teachers and curriculum planners is to work out a basis on which some total scheme can be built (9).

The implication of Kelly's suggestion is that curriculum thinking should be a priority in order to promote educational practices such as, teaching, learning and the organisation of educational institutions. These practices are based on beliefs and values of society, the views about knowledge and role of education. These values and beliefs encompass the backbone of the design of the curriculum.

3.3.2 Clark's Philosophical Framework

This research argues that there are potential mismatches between the stated purposes of education in higher education and the views and beliefs of the stakeholders involved think. The goals of higher education programmes cannot be achieved if there are

mismatches among various stakeholders. Most recent Omani literature on the higher education curriculum, as explained in the literature review, analyses or reports on the impact of the globalized curriculum without consulting those upon whom the impact is actually felt. However, this research explores the influences of the HE curriculum on the various interested parties involved in the curriculum themselves; and it does this through a consideration of the underlying (philosophies) values and assumptions. This will allow exploring how tensions play out on the ground. According to Ornstein (1990:7), in considering the influence of philosophic thought on curriculum, curriculum philosophies and how they affect curriculum, instruction and teaching should be analysed. Then, the content of the components is to be compared with stakeholders own philosophical 'lens' in terms of how they view curriculum and how other views of curriculum and related instructional and teaching issues may disagree. In order to investigate the possibility of these mismatches, a philosophical framework is used. Curriculum design has been influenced by some philosophies that provide the theoretical underpinnings of different educational programmes and justification for the content of these programmes. Eisner (1992, as cited in Richards, 2001:113) observes: 'Because educational practice is concerned with the achievement of certain desired end states, it relies on a larger value matrix to secure and justify the directions in which it moves.' In other words, in order to achieve what curriculum intends to do, it has to rely on philosophical and theoretical assumptions. Thus, curriculum philosophies should be considered.

As many curriculum theorists have argued (Clark, 1987; Ellis, 2004; Ornstein, 2013; Schiro, 2013; White, 1988) there are various approaches to exploring curriculum.

Within language curriculum study, Clark (1987) basing his views on Skilbeck's (1982) framework identifies three curriculum philosophies that shape the nature of the ELT curriculum, namely classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism. These

philosophies provide different views about the curriculum. Each of them embodies different beliefs about the type of knowledge that should be taught, what learning consists of, how teachers should teach, and how students should be assessed (See Appendix G). Some theorists have identified positions similar to these philosophies using different terminologies and others have identified more than these three philosophies (Schiro, 2013; Eisner, 1974; McNeil, 1977; Kliebard, 2004; Ellis, 2004; Posner, 1992). Although these philosophies have different views of values and knowledge, they all aim improve the process of education by enhancing learners' achievement, producing better citizens and improving society (Ornstein, 1990:108). In this research, the curriculum visions, value systems, opinions, ideologies and perspectives are called *curriculum philosophies*. In order to understand how the ELT curriculum might be interpreted by different stakeholders, this section reviews Clark's (1987) philosophies of curriculum. They will be used as a framework for analysing data in this present study. This review implies its theoretical relevance to Omani higher education.

3.3.2.1 Rationale for Clark (1987) framework in analyzing data

A consideration of the recent literature on curriculum philosophies, such as Schiro (2013) 'Conflicting Visions and Enduring Concerns' and Ellis (2004) 'Exemplars of curriculum Theory' who describe different conflicting views about curricula, found that the philosophical views presented by Clark (1987) were more useful for this study for many reasons.

First, there is little literature on the planning of curricula for English language undergraduate academic programmes. Most studies examine course work or competencies from a practitioner or academic perspective. One of the forgotten elements in these examinations is the philosophical influence underlying English language

teaching. Clark's framework focuses on language teaching and learning. To the best knowledge of the researcher, Clark's work is unique in dealing with language curriculum philosophies, thus facilitating a methodical review of all the curriculum issues pertaining to English language teaching.

Second, given the fact that any academic area has its unique challenges, it seemed a logical decision to choose a theoretical framework which focuses on language teaching and learning and which can be used to frame issues of teachers, administrators and consultants, who are external to Oman, drafted in to key positions and, consequently, imposing conceptualisations and practical implementations of teaching and learning which may not match the cultural context. Clark's framework seemed better to allow the highlighting of tensions and conflicts pertaining to different beliefs about language teaching and learning.

This framework has, however, been criticized. According to Pennycook (1990: 307), Clark's framework (as he adopted the framework from Skilbeck (1984) is 'not at all what is needed in curriculum development'. As the present study is concerned with the examining mismatches among stakeholders involved in higher education, the framework is has been found to be very useful.

While the Omani government's main goal for education is to promote the knowledge economy, there are other goals such as promoting critical thinking and problem solving. This framework will help to make sense of what the stakeholders think as well as reveal the mismatches among them. Various scholars have acknowledged that there are serious philosophical confusions in people's ideas about curriculum. Although 'Philosophical clarification will not of itself answer our practical problems, (...) it cannot but help in promoting more rational solutions of them' (Schiro, 2013:2).

3.3.2.2 Philosophies Underpinning ELT Curriculum

This section draws extensively on the work of Clark (1987), which based his views on the work of Skilbeck (1984).

Classical Humanism

Theorists have identified several positions similar to Classical Humanism. Terminology has frequently changed over time. This terminology has included academic rationalism (Eisner, 1974), intellectual traditionalist (Schubert (1966), traditional and structure of the disciplines (Ponser, 1992), academic (McNeil, 1977; Zeichner, 1993), knowledge centered (Ellis, 2004), humanist (Kliebard, 2004) and scholar academic (Schiro, 2013).

The Classical Humanism Philosophy can be traced back to Plato. The ultimate goal of classical humanists is ‘promt(ing) broad intellectual capacities, such as memorization and the ability to analyze, classify, and reconstruct elements of knowledge’ (Clark, 1987: 5). Classical humanism views knowledge as a set of revealed truths that should be passed from one generation to another, so this knowledge is to be transmitted through education (Clark, 1987:49). The task of the learner is to apply this knowledge in new contexts. It is believed that education should be concerned with subject matter (Clark, 1987:53) and should cultivate moral excellence (Ornstein et. al, 2013:84).

Curriculum emphasis in this philosophy is content-driven and the approach is student-centered. The content matter is viewed as the basis for a curriculum and mastery of content is an end (Richards, 2001:114). The main aim of a curriculum is to promote intellectual capacities such as memorization and the ability to analyze, classify and reconstruct elements of knowledge (Clark, 1987: 5-6). These capacities help learners to encounter challenges in life. In many educational systems in various countries, classical humanism has been invoked to educate a critically minded elite (Ornstein et. al, 2013:84) concerned as it is with promoting critical thinking (Clark, 1987: 5).

The teacher's role is transmitting knowledge and stimulating discussion (Ornstein et. al, 2013:84). It is believed that the teacher is the one who possesses knowledge and whose task is to pass it to learners (Clark, 1987:5). In a language curriculum, the students' task is to acquire knowledge by moving through the textbook, to become aware of the rules underlying sentence construction and to memorize the grammatical features in order to apply them in new contexts (Clark, 1987:5-6). The assessment in this philosophy is norm-referenced, which is concerned with the selection of learners who can enter the next stage of education. Tests are designed to assess learners' mastery of subject matter and whether they can apply it in new contexts (Clark, 1987:7).

Reconstructivism

Theorists have identified several positions similar to reconstructivism. Terminology has frequently changed over time. This terminology has included 'technological' (McNeil, 1977), 'social behaviorist' (Schubert, 1996), 'training for work and survival' (Josef et. al, 2000) and 'social efficiency' (Kliebard, 2004; Schiro, 2013, Zeichner, 1993).

With the changing views in the curriculum philosophies, reconstructivism appears as a reaction to classical humanism (White, 1988). This philosophy is society-oriented (Clark, 1987:3). It is concerned with bringing social change through education (Clark, 1987; White, 1988). The main purpose of education is to prepare learners to be effective members in the society and to solve society issues. A curriculum is used to promote social and economic education and is objectives-driven. Instruction is guided by defined behavioral objectives, and learners are required to undertake a great deal of rehearsal to gain mastery of skills (Clark, 1987:17). There is a strong emphasis on the development of skills and the functions of language beside linguistic knowledge (Richard, 2001:115). It also stresses the needs of society as a justification for teaching English (Richards, 2001:116). In contrast to classical humanism, which entails a common core curriculum

for all learners, reconstructivists argue that learners should be valued as equals regardless of their ability or achievement (Clark, 1987:14). Needs analysis is considered as basis of the curriculum (Clark, 1987:35).

Reconstructivism has been criticized because teachers and learners become ‘servants of the curriculum’, which has been determined in advance for them (Clark, 1987:33).

Learners are expected to acquire behaviors and practice them and are viewed as potential adults who can fulfill the needs of their society. Criterion-referenced assessment is used to compare students against predetermined standards (Clark, 1987:18).

It is worth mentioning that reconstructionism naturally leads to certain classroom procedures, whether behaviourist or communicative. Many teachers think that they have moved away from behaviourism and into something more communicative but both approaches are reconstructionist underneath given that what they are trying to do is turning someone into something else.

Progressivism

Theorists have identified several positions similar to progressivism. Terminology has frequently changed over time. This terminology has included ‘humanist’ (McNeil, 1977), ‘experiential and cognitive’ (Ponser, 1992), ‘developmentalist’ (Zeickner, 1993), ‘progressive and learner centered’ (Ellis, 2004), ‘child study’ (Kliebard, 2004) and ‘learner-centered’ (Schiro, 2013). As most of the names would imply, progressivism centers around individual progress, growth or development from within through experience. Progressive education is concerned about providing learners with learning experiences from which they learn how to learn by their own efforts (Clark, 1987:49).

Progressivism in the language curriculum design emphasizes methodology which can be confused with other curriculum philosophies as the ideas in this philosophy refer to learning and teaching methods rather than content and objectives. It is represented by the

'process' approach. Stenhouse (1975:92) pointed at 'principles of procedure' which guide the teaching and learning process. These principles include question posing, classroom discussion, using first hand sources, reflecting students' experiences and the teacher becomes a resource rather than an authority.

Progressivism is a philosophy of education that encourages learning which is related to real-life situations (White, 1988). Knowledge is seen as 'a creative problem-solving capacity' that offers a solution to any problem (Clark, 1987:49). With this view of knowledge, education is believed to provide learners with learning experiences; learners learn by their own efforts (Clark, 1987:49). Education aims at stimulating learners' growth and development. A progressive curriculum emphasizes the quality of experience and process of growth over content and skill mastery (Clark, 1987:33): the curriculum is process-driven. Learner involvement and individual differences among learners are promoted (Clark, 1987:55) and there is therefore more emphasis on learner needs instead of content mastery or the demands of society. There is also less attention to grammatical features and more attention to semantic units.

The role of the teacher is as a facilitator of learning: she is seen as a creator of an environment in which learners learn how to learn (Clark, 1987:49). This means giving the students the opportunity to express themselves as people who can share ideas and giving the teacher the chance to be more knowledgeable about the students themselves. Learners are not only expected to learn the academic knowledge but to use knowledge to solve problems in real situations (Clark, 1987:53). They are encouraged to interact, plan and make decisions. Peer and self-evaluation are key elements (Clark, 1987:53) and the emphasis is on formative assessment and ongoing assessment. Instead of the judgment of the teacher, the main purpose of assessment is self-improvement: assessment is student initiated and student monitored.

A discussion of the principles of the three philosophies shows that progressivism is a combination of both classical humanism and reconstructivism. In classical humanism, learners are trained to relate new information and use it in new contexts so they gain new insights through problem solving and critical inquiry. In reconstructivism, students are taught how to cope with the changes in the society and how to control them. They use the subject matter of social experience in solving problems. Therefore, they are able to respond to the challenges that their society faces. In progressivism, learners' needs and interests are given a priority so they express themselves and share ideas. In this way, students have the chance to grow and develop intellectually. They are taught how to cope with change and they gain new insights through general and critical inquiry. Progressivism principles are believed to govern the educational practices of today as they create bridges between subjects taught and student needs.

3.3.2.3 Social Progress Through Curriculum Philosophies

Tracing the history of these philosophies, it appears that the curriculum has always been influenced by societal needs. In order to help young learners to grow and mature, they have been oriented towards meeting the demands of culture and society. Curriculum content for such orientation, however, has varied from one period to another depending on the influence of educational philosophies. According to Clark (1987), the foreign language curriculum has moved away from classical humanist practices to 'egalitarianism' and learner centeredness (p.3). In classical humanism, the curriculum focused on subject matter, such as religion and literature (Ornstein et. al, 2013:84). Social needs and student interest were given less emphasis. Gradually, industrial development and societal changes shifted the focus of the curriculum from subject matter to meeting the needs of society and eventually the growth and development of individuals.

Changes in the curriculum that are currently occurring in many countries around the world are being driven by the trend of globalization that stresses the need for education systems to prepare students for participation in a competitive economic world. Rapid scientific and technological changes during this era have created the demand for English language as a medium of communication. Accordingly, English language teaching (ELT) has become very important. Because of globalization, companies require employees to have a certain level of English language knowledge. The need to design a work-related English language curriculum that suits a specific target group has increased. In a report about employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates, Lowden et al. (2011) have found that employers expect graduates to have the skills and knowledge from their degrees and require graduates to perform to other general capabilities that include 'team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and often managerial abilities or potential' (p.24). They recommend that universities need to promote employability skills and attributes in their mission statements, learning and teaching strategies, course framework, strategic documents and practical guidance. They also stress the responsibility of HEIs in taking into account students' employment needs including generic skills and abilities needed in the workplace and reflecting them in the curriculum design. The design of the curriculum, and student experience in general, should be articulated with the needs of business in mind (p.25). With this view of potential employees and to keep up with current changes, great importance should be placed on curriculum design in order to meet the current needs of learners.

Based on the objectives of higher education as indicated by Vision 2020, referred in the literature, it appears that the Omani philosophy of education includes the principles of the three philosophies referred to above, as it aims to develop learners culturally and socially and to grow intellectually.

This section has outlined the theoretical framework for analysing the data. Figure 3 presents the major elements in the theoretical framework for analysing data. As the figure shows, in order to examine stakeholders' (See section 3.4) thinking about ELT curriculum, Clark's (1987) curriculum philosophies, namely classical humanism, reconstructivism and progressivism will be applied. This will allow exploring the potential tensions and confusions as suggested in literature review chapter.

Having described the theoretical aspect, the following sections describes the research setting, the participants, data collection, data analysis process and trustworthiness.

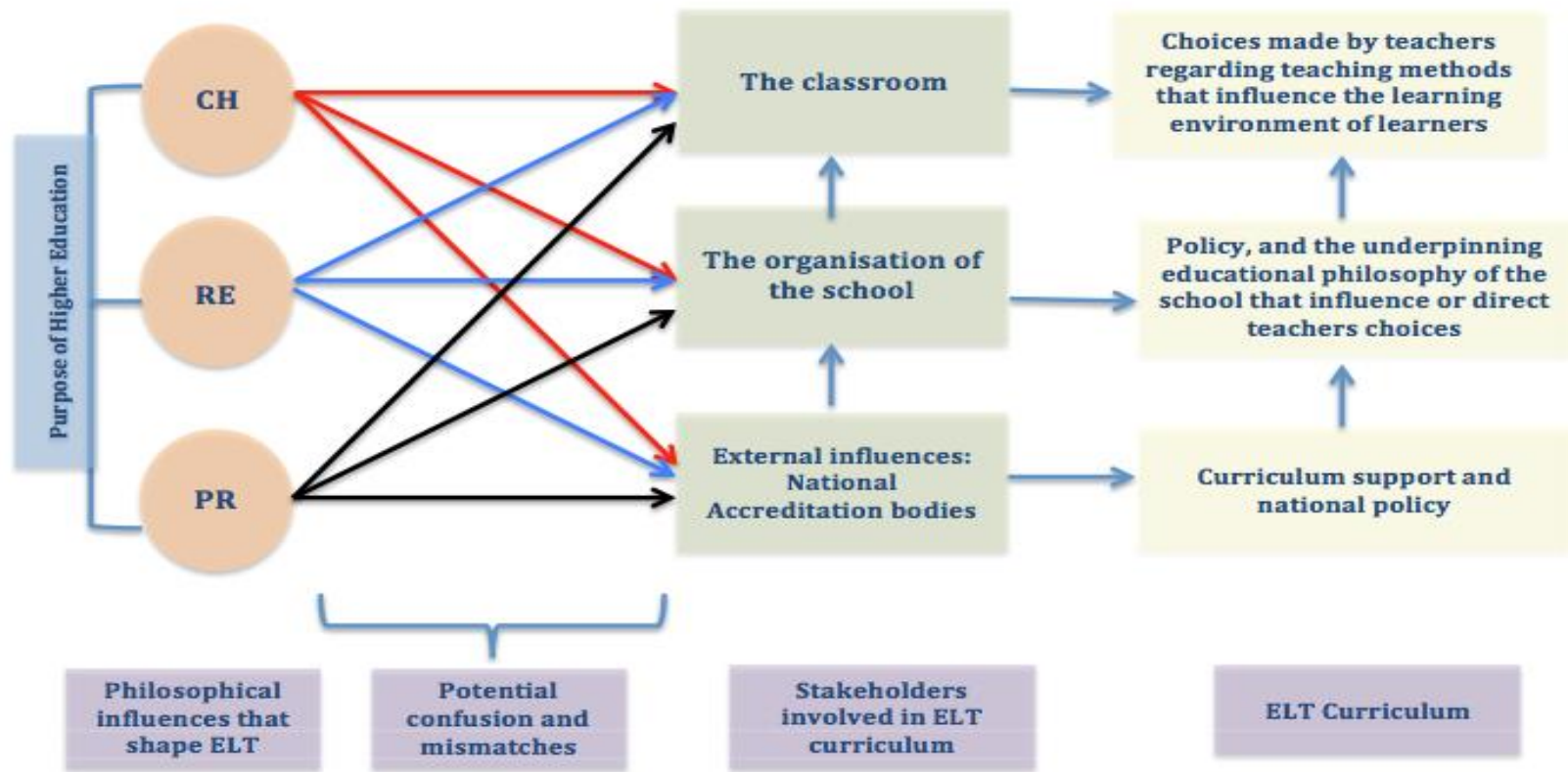


Figure 3 The Study Theoretical Framework

3.4 Research setting

The exploration of the possible tensions in higher education was based at a small college called Oman Tourism College in Oman (hereafter OTC). OTC, the only higher education institution in the country that specializes in Tourism and Hospitality, is located in Muscat. The main focus of OTC is to educate and train a skilled and qualified workforce for the tourism and hospitality sectors. All undergraduate programmes offered by the College are validated and awarded by the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), Ireland. The college consists of three Academic Departments: Department of Tourism and Management, Department of Language Studies and Department of Hospitality and Training.

OTC offers different academic programs in the fields of tourism and hospitality.

Students can study for their undergraduate degrees: Tourism and Hospitality Management, Event Management or Tourism Marketing. There is also a two-year full-time Diploma in Tourism and Hospitality Management programme. OTC also delivers professional and vocational courses such as International cuisine, Guest Relations Officer, Etiquette for Serving VIP Guests, Language Courses (English, French German and Spanish), which are designed to meet the needs of the clients.

OTC was chosen as the setting for this research for a number of reasons. First, the researcher is familiar with the college and the people who work there. Therefore, getting access was not an issue for conducting this study. Second, based on the literature review, tourism is one of the important sectors, which has been emphasized in Vision 2020 for diversifying economy in Oman. There is a huge need for skilled workers in this industry. Thus, investigating a tourism college would allow seeing the educational practices in real and gain a better understanding of the way graduates are prepared to meet the needs of

the market. Third, OTC has an affiliation with an external HEI, which would allow seeing the international practices in the local context.

3.4.1 BSc (Hons) in Tourism and Hospitality Management Programme (THMP): An Overview

The BSc (Hons) in Tourism and Hospitality Management is a new program, which started in the academic year 2013/2014, and is a four-year program. The focus of the programme is developing students' academic, practical and transferable competencies and skills, such as leadership, communication skills and team work, to enhance employability and to ensure graduates are ready for the workplace. It also aims to equip graduates with the appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes required for entry level supervisory and junior management positions and to compete with international hospitality and tourism graduates. On completing the BSc (Hons) in Tourism and Hospitality Management, students are expected to communicate effectively with different stakeholders and in all modes of communication (written, oral and electronic) in different formal and informal settings.

This study focuses on the ELT curriculum in this programme. English language modules are offered to the students in the BSc program. In order to graduate, students are required to take four English language modules, and complete other English-medium lecture subjects and professional internships. Therefore, English language modules are designed to prepare students for their academic and professional purposes. English language modules are planned and implemented by the Department of language studies at OTC.

3.5 Participants

In order to obtain a robust view of the higher education tensions, it was necessary to elicit information from people who were involved in a higher education English language programme. Inspiration concerning the best people from whom to gather data came from Littledyke (1996). According to Littledyke (1996:120), the way educators understand the nature and purpose of education affects the way they teach and assess. In other words, the pedagogical consequences of their philosophical views are directly influenced by the underpinning assumptions which they hold about the purpose of the curriculum. As the field of English language curriculum studies shaped the design of this research and the conceptual framework mentioned in the previous section, it was thought that Littledyke's framework would be a good choice.

Littledyke (1996:120) identifies three levels of organisation existing in the educational environment, which influence the curriculum. These can be categorised as follows:

- (1) The classroom, which includes the daily experience of teachers and students in schools. This includes teachers' learning and teaching approaches to the curriculum. Thus, choices made by teachers regarding teaching methods influence the learning environment of students directly.
- (2) The organisation of the school, which influences or directs the choices made in the classroom. This includes policy, and the underpinning educational philosophy of the school.
- (3) External influences include local education authorities, which provide curriculum support, national educational bodies, which are responsible for design and assessment of the curriculum, or the government. Other external influences acting indirectly on schools include parents, the media, higher education institutions which are responsible for teacher education and the business

community which includes employers.

Based on this framework, the primary stakeholders in this study are the major players in the English language programme at OTC in Oman. They include OAAA policymakers, OTC administrators, and ELT teachers.

(1) OAAA policymakers

OAAA policymakers design and revise higher education's policy documents at the national level. In order to locate participants, the OAAA website was visited and an email was sent to OAAA 'enquiries'. In the email, the researcher requested to put her in touch with members who formulated and revised the Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance in Higher Education document. What was being sought was the members' personal views on, and their contribution to formulating/revising the document.

After emailing OAAA, a reply email was received confirming that the person (a Quality assurance consultant) who was appointed to meet the researcher was having an audit trip. Afterwards an email was sent confirming the date of the interview. It was a difficult task to gain access to the institution and there was a two-month delay before a meeting with one participant only.

The participant was Amanda (A pseudonym name, see Ethical Issues Section 3.7).

Amanda is an expatriate consultant at OAAA. Amanda, who worked as consultant at OAAA and was brought to Oman to develop the Institution of Standards. She also conducted quality assurance visits to evaluate HEIs against institutional standards.

(2) OTC administrators and curriculum designers

OTC administrators set out the rules and regulations in relation to teaching and learning at departmental levels; curriculum designers draft, design, and revise the curriculum, its materials at the institutional level. OTC administrators' profiles are shown in Table 5.

Particip-ants	Gender	Position	Age range	Qualification	Years of experience	Nationality
John	M	Administrator	50-60	-	+ 20 years	Canadian
Qader	M	Administrator	50-60	PhD in engineering	+ 20 years	Omani
Sahila	F	Administrator	45-55	PhD in quality assurance	+ 20 years	Indian

Table 5 OTC administrators' profiles

As the researcher was contacting the college for curriculum designers, they were a mix of administrators and ELT teachers who were involved in the design of ELT curriculum in the degree programme. Looking at the modules materials, there were no textbooks used, thus there were no interviews for textbooks' authors conducted.

(3) ELT teachers

ELT teachers who deliver the curriculum in the classroom. Their profiles are shown in Table 6.

Particip-ants	Gender	Position	Age range	Qualification	Years of experience	Nationality
Ahmed	M	English language teacher	25-35	MA in English language Teaching	10 years	Omani
Amal	F	English language teacher	40-50	MA in Translation, BA in English language and Literature	19 years	Jordanian
Abdul	M	English language teacher	40-50	MA in English	16 years	Pakistani
Beth	F	English language teacher	30-40	A Degree in hotel and restaurant management, CELTA	5 years	English
David	M	English language teacher	35-40	PhD in English	23 years	Filipino
Gina	F	English language teacher	30-40	PhD in English	9 years	Indian
Zyad	M	English language teacher	35-45	MA in TESOL	+ 20 years	Omani

Table 6 ELT teachers' profiles

3.6 Data collection

Once access has been secured, appropriate data collection methods needed to be adopted.

For this study documents and interviews were used.

3.6.1 Documentary data

As one among several possible qualitative research techniques, documents were one of the main sources of information used in this study. The documentary analysis aims to assist with the process of triangulation with the interview data in order to verify the perceptions of participants and enhance credibility of the data (Rubin, 2011: 28). The following list shows the main documents used for the analysis:

OAAA documents:

- Institutional Standards Assessment Manual (ISAM)
- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

OTC documents:

- Tourism and Hospitality Management Programme Handbook (THMP handbook)
- OTC website
- Academic Quality Assurance Manual (AQAM)
- Descriptors of English Language Modules of the THMP:
 - Academic English (AEMD)
 - Academic Writing (AWMD)
 - Intensive Reading & Writing (IRWMD)
 - Personal Development Communication (PDCMD)
- Materials of English Language Modules of the BSc Programme
 - Academic English
 - Academic Writing
 - Intensive Reading & Writing

- Personal Development Communication

During the data collection, OAAA documents were gathered from the OAAA official website, as they are all available to the public. OTC administrators and ELT teachers, whom the researcher interviewed, were kind to provide curriculum manuals and ELT modules descriptors and materials.

3.6.2 Interviews

According to Rubin & Rubin (2011: 27), ‘documents are most useful when combined with in-depth interviews that allow you to discuss with their creators what they contain and how they were prepared’. Interviews were used as a primary source of data collection in order to obtain stakeholders’ views on curriculum. A semi-structured interview table (see Appendix A) allowed the researcher ‘to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic’ (Merriam, 2009:90). The interviews were conducted in OAAA and OTC, where policy makers, administrators and teachers were interviewed. All interviews were in English and each interview took from 20-40 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed.

Piloting interviews questions

In order to ensure that participants understood the interview questions, four interviews were conducted with PhD students at the University of York. Piloting interview questions was important in order to think about participants’ responses, matching themes, create thematic heading for interviewing people (refer to components of curriculum). The interviews were audio-recorded. By drawing on their responses, the researcher was able to make some changes to the questions. Their profiles are shown in the following table.

Participants	Status/position
---------------------	------------------------

T1	General English teacher in Oman
T2	Teaching English for literature major students in Saudi Arabia
T3	General English teacher in Oman
T4	General English teacher in Kuwait

Table 7 Pilot interviews participants' profiles

The participants were considered as excellent candidates to answer the interview questions. They were recruited because of their English language teaching background. They also came from Oman and neighbouring GCC countries, which means they came from the same area of the current research setting. All were friends of the researcher at the University of York and were willing to participate in the study. It was very interesting and useful to find out that those participants were involved in the decision-making process for English programmes and in classroom teaching, and that therefore they might understand better about the practicalities of the learning environment in GCC. The pilot study helped to find out about the duration of the interviews and what questions needed to be amended based on participants' answers.

3.7 Ethical issues

The ethical issues in this study were addressed. Two ethical principles were considered in this study: informed consent and confidentiality.

Informed consent

One of the important ethical requirements was getting the consent of participants before taking part in the study. For this study, before conducting the fieldwork, ethical approval for the proposed research was obtained from Education Ethics Committee of the University of York.

A request for approval letter was sent to the assistant dean at Oman Tourism College (OTC) in order to gain access to the teachers and administrators at OTC. The letter

(Appendix) explains the nature of the research. Once access was gained, interviews' schedule dates were set according to the participants' availability.

Before an interview, the research aims and interview purposes were carefully explained to the participants. A consent form was shown and explained to them, (See Appendix B), which the participants were asked to sign before the interview. The consent form detailed the purpose of the study and a description of the involvement required and the rights of the participants. Their permission to tape-record the interview was obtained. Permission was granted without hesitation in all cases. Only in one instance, one of the participants was somewhat apprehensive about being quoted. When he was asked a question during the interview, he said that 'you came to a very sensitive issue which of course you take it as a researcher here and I ask you not to quote me on this one'. He was assured that the data collected were purely for the research and the raw data would not be accessible for a third party.

In order to contact the members at Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), an email (attached) was sent to the Acting Chair at OAAA. In this email, the nature of the research was explained and a request to put the researcher in touch with the members of programme standards documents. Then members were contacted by the researcher and dates were set for interviews.

It was intended to follow the same procedures for the authors of language course books and the curriculum designers in the degree programme. However, as explained in the participants section, there were no authors and the curriculum designers were the teachers themselves, getting help from the college management.

Confidentiality

Protecting the identity of the research location and the participants presented a dilemma in this research. The first dilemma was how to protect the identity of the research setting

– Oman Tourism College (OTC) and Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA).

There is only one tourism school in Oman. Thus, attempting to conceal the identity of the school would have been impossible. However, there was a need to protect the identity of the participants.

Concealing the identity of participants was a difficult task because both OTC and OAAA are small institutions where everyone knows everyone else. The fact that only a small proportion of members were given the responsibility of reviewing OAAA standards guidelines and the responsibility of the ELT curriculum at OTC, made the task of concealing the identity of participants even more challenging. However, assigning pseudonyms to all participants was followed to maintain anonymity. Although there is no guarantee of total anonymity of participants as far as insiders are concerned, identities are at least protected from outsiders.

3.8 Data Analysis process

In this study, a content analysis approach was adopted to analyse the data. This section explains why and how this approach was used, and describes the process of data analysis and interpretation.

A content analysis approach

The content analysis approach is a useful method for analysing and interpreting narrative data. As Powell and Renner (2003:1) note, qualitative data consists of words and observations, not numbers, thus analysing and interpreting this data requires bringing order and understanding. According to them, texts come in different forms, such as open-ended questions on a survey, transcripts of focus group discussions or interviews, field notes, notes from a diary or the text of a document, so this kind of data produces narrative data that require analysis.

During the data analysis process, the step-by-step guide for doing content analysis provided by Powell and Renner (2003) was followed, drawing on the following phases:

1. Getting to know the data
2. Focus the analysis
3. Categorize information
4. Identify patterns and connections between categories
5. Interpretation-bringing it all together

In step one, familiarity with the data was achieved by transcribing the interviews, preparing all documents, printing them out for reading and re-reading, and writing down initial impressions.

In step two, the purpose of the analysis, and what it was intended to find out, was reviewed. Based on Clark’s framework of language curriculum philosophies (1987), as mentioned in in a previous section in this chapter, key questions were identified, which helped to get this step started. The questions, as shown in table 8, included the following components of curriculum, embedded in each philosophy: school mission, aim, knowledge, teacher’s role, student’s role, learning and assessment. In this focus-by-question approach, the analysis was focused to permit a view of how all individuals responded to each question. These open-ended questions helped ‘to organize the data by question to look across all respondents and their answers in order to identify consistencies and differences’ (Powell and Renner, 2003:1). These questions were to find out about stakeholders’ philosophical influences and views about the curriculum, which consequently would help to find about confusion and mismatches.

Purpose of analysis	Data sources	Open ended questions used for analysis
To examine stakeholders’ thinking about the	Semi-structured interviews	a) What is the school mission? b) What is the aim of the curriculum? c) What kind of knowledge?

ELT curriculum	and Documents	d) How is learning taking place? e) What is the role of students? f) What is the role of teachers? g) What is the purpose of assessment?
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Table 8 The purpose of analysis and key questions used for reviewing components of the ELT curriculum

Step three is also known as coding the data (Taylor-Powell & Runner, 2003: 2). In this step the coherent categories need to be identified. As explained in the previous step, three philosophies: Classical humanism, Reconstructivism and Progressivism were used to examine participants' beliefs about the ELT curriculum. These three curriculum philosophies were the main categories used for the analysis and they were abbreviated as CH, RE and PR respectively. Under each of these categories (in this case, curriculum philosophies), the characteristics of the components of curriculum embedded in each philosophy were included.

Careful consideration was given to using computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) to assist data management and analysis. Attendance at an NVivo workshop resulted in gaining a general idea about using this software. Based on that experience, all transcripts were inserted in Nvivo.

Following this, three categories were created, comprising CH, RE, and PR. In each category, sub-categories were created. These sub-categories included the seven curriculum components identified in table 1. Then the search began in the data for texts (statements, phrases and words) that matched the categories. This step involved reading and re-reading the texts in order to decide where to classify them. To this end, the data was carefully analysed, with special attention being paid to statements, phrases, words used (the term 'references' is used to represent them), within the framework of Clark's curriculum philosophies, and the characteristics of the components of curriculum embedded in each philosophy: school mission, aim, knowledge, teacher's role, student's

role, learning and assessment. An example of how data was managed using Nvivo, is shown in table 9.

Categories	Subcategories	References (examples)
CH	School mission	To change the mentality of many people in the country to show them that tourism is all not what is it is set out to be.
	Aim	Enhance a student’s English learning capacity and to make sure that increases.
	Knowledge	Appreciate one’s own culture, values and traditions while being open to other cultures, perspectives and traditions
	Teacher’s role	Possess sufficient breadth or depth of specialist knowledge in the discipline
	Student’s role	Develop their capacity for analytical, critical thinking
	Learning	It depends if I am going to follow the detective method or the inductive method of grammar
	Assessment	Shows clear and strong understanding of subject matter/concepts/issues.

Table 9 An example of how data was managed using Nvivo

While working on moving references for each category and subcategory, it was realized that Nvivo was not a good option to analyse the data. The reason is that there were overlaps. Some references were applied in more than one category and more than one subcategory. Other references needed to be edited or removed depending on the meaning that directed the researcher where to classify them. As one of the goals of classifying the data was counting the number of occurrences of references in each philosophy, Nvivo did not allow for an accurate number of references used in each philosophy. In some cases, it did not code all the ‘revised’ references and did not give the precise coding that was required. It was therefore difficult to continue using Nvivo. It was recognized that it

was only a tool and was not able to carry out automatic data analysis. After consulting a few PhD graduates and the research supervisor, it was suggested that analyzing data manually would allow for getting to know the data very well. Thus, a decision was made to manually code and manage data.

A table was prepared to identify references to corresponding philosophies, and characteristics of each component of curriculum (An example in Appendix F). The table helped to provide direction in what to look for in the data before searching the data for text that matched the categories (Taylor-Powell & Runner, 2003: 3). Table 10 shows how the columns of the table were arranged in order to analyse data related to the English Language program.

The analysis began by focusing on each participant, as well as documents, and the creation of tables for each component for each participant, as shown in table 10, used for one of the participants to find the number of references in ‘the aim of curriculum’ component.

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Number of references
CH		0
RE	- To prepare the students to cope well with the content modules	1
PR		0

Table 10 Example of data coding – The aim of ELT curriculum

This table shows that this participant views the aim of the curriculum from a reconstructivism perspective. One reference was found indicating the participant’s thinking about the aim of the curriculum. There are no references mentioned for the aim of classical humanism and progressivism philosophies. All other components of philosophies were treated the same way.

While coding, it was found that some references appeared to belong to more than one philosophy and more than one component. In order to solve this issue, these references

were highlighted by using a different colour. This technique helped when counting the number of references. An example is shown in tables 11 and 12. This example shows that this participant's view on the roles of the teacher and the student can be either classical humanism and progressivism.

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Number of references
CH	Students are involved in discussions (coloured reference))	1
RE		0
PR	Students are involved in discussions (coloured reference))	1

Table 11 An example of data coding – The role of the teacher

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Number of references
CH	Students are involved in discussions (coloured reference)	1
RE		0
PR	Students are involved in discussions (coloured reference)	1

Table 12 An example of data coding – The role of the student

Another issue was that some words were problematic, as they seemed to be confusing and very hard to classify. In order to deal with this problematic words issue, key words emerging from coding were grouped for each philosophy from the data, as shown in table 13. Cognitive items were grouped under classical humanism. Affective items were grouped under progressivism. Problematic words were thought to be of a different order, compared to the three groups. They appear to be about the practicalities of teaching which can fit any of the three philosophies. Grouping these words was very helpful for the analysis process as it provided guidance as to what to include and what to exclude and where to classify certain words. To ensure consistency, choices were checked and verified by the research supervisor on a regular basis, making adjustments as necessary.

CH	RE	PR	Problematic words
Make them aware What should be understanding Capacity Getting information?? Mentality Make them think Application of (abstract) knowledge inference	Make them compatible Raise their skills How to.... Capability?? Ability	Raise their personality Express views – they have something to say about it. Personality development Self-awareness self-analysis Learning by doing?? Generate ideas, creative thinking, develop an argument	Teach, advise, guide, help Standards Work in groups Interactive Humorous Enjoy Mentoring Do exam Completing assignments

Table 13 key words emerged from coding for each philosophy

Moving from the problematic words issue to another tricky issue, some of the participants' responses used key words from a particular philosophy while their practices fit a different philosophy. For example, one teacher said that she preferred a 'student-centered approach' during instruction, which is codifiable as PR, while her practices proved to be 'a teacher who possesses knowledge', categorised as CH. In order to solve this issue, the recordings were listened to again in order to get the whole general picture and before returning again to look at the specifics.

During the process of coding, data were sent for peer debriefing (more details provided in the trustworthiness section in this chapter). Feedback received from peer debriefers included some comments and questions about the justification of putting different references in different categories. Thus, it was decided to add another column explaining the justification of putting a reference in a particular category, as shown in Table 14. Interviews and documents were scrutinised again, justifying each statement by referring to the literature. This process included a large amount of reading and re-reading in order to grasp a deeper understanding of the three philosophies and to justify decisions made.

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Number of references	Justification

CH	Students are involved in discussions	1	Promoting general intellectual capacities
RE		0	
PR	Students are involved in discussions	1	Providing the conditions in which the mental processes for spontaneous learning

Table 14 A example of data coding – Learning component

In step four, in order to highlight variations among participants' views about curriculum and to find out where the mismatches lie, a counting process was initiated to calculate the number of references in each component for each individual, level of organisation (policymakers, administrators and teachers) and all participants. According to Taylor-Powell & Runner (2003: 5), 'these counts provide a very rough estimate of relative importance. They are not suited to statistical analysis, but they can reveal general patterns in the data'. Thus based on these counts, the researcher could tell which philosophy was highlighted the most in each component, within individuals and within each level of organisation.

Step five is about interpreting the data – attaching meaning and significance to the analysis (Taylor-Powell & Runner, 2003: 5). As a result of categorizing and sorting the data, a list of important findings began to be developed. In order to present the results about the philosophical views about curriculum among participants, Venn circles and bar charts were used. According to Taylor-Powell & Runner (2003: 5), 'a visual display might help communicate the finding.'

Other than presenting the findings and showing whether or not the participants were similar or different in their views, Venn circles and bar charts helped to present fuzziness described in terms of the overlapping philosophies. They showed clearly where the references were placed, which caused confusion about their classification. Moreover, descriptive examples and quotes were used to illustrate the points and to bring data to

life. In terms of presenting findings, it was thought to present the analysis of documents first and then the interviews. However, it was decided to present the data obtained from both methods concurrently to avoid any confusion.

The whole process of data analysis turned out to be demanding and complex. Figure 4 attempts to show the complexity of the process of data analysis. It happened gradually but eventually it became clear as through the process described above.

3.9 Trustworthiness

Some qualitative researchers address the issue of validity and reliability by discussing the concept of trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004: 64; Linclon & Guba, 1985: 290). Trustworthiness is about persuading readers that the findings of an inquiry are sound and the argument made based on these findings is strong (Linclon & Guba, 1985: 290). A number of strategies have been identified in the literature pertaining to the issue of trustworthiness. Four trustworthiness issues emerged as necessary to assess the findings of a qualitative inquiry (Linclon & Guba, 1985: 290). These issues were credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The following sections describe these issues of trustworthiness in relation to the present study.

3.9.1 Credibility

According to Anney (2014: 276), credibility is defined as ‘the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings’. In order to ensure this confidence, the researcher must show that the inquiry is accurately reported (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 296). Various strategies have been recognized to promote the credibility of a qualitative research. Strategies used in this research consisted of peer debriefing, reflective journals and triangulation.

Peer debriefing

Peer debriefing occurs when the qualitative researcher seeks support from colleagues or

professionals willing to provide guidance and feedback in order to improve the quality of the findings of the inquiry (Anney, 2014: 276). It provides the researcher with the opportunity to assess whether or not the findings make sense based on the raw data (Merriam, 2002). In addition, it helps the researcher to develop the next steps and whether or not to consider certain steps in the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 296). In this study, peer debriefing occurred in different phases of data analysis and interpretation.

At the beginning of the data analysis, it seemed necessary to ensure whether or not coding make sense. In order to do that, an email was sent to three PhD students. The email included an explanation of one of the curriculum components (the role of the students) in the three philosophies. Two excerpts (raw data) from two individual interviews were provided, to compare how the two interviewees view the role of students in the ELT programme (see Appendix E). Two PhD students replied to the email and provided the coding of the two excerpts. After receiving their coding, a meeting was conducted to reflect on their decisions made about the role of the students. Although there were some inconsistencies and differences in their choices of the three philosophies, it was not an issue at that time of the analysis process.

Then, a full individual interview was coded in order to find out this individual's philosophical beliefs about the ELT curriculum. In order to compare coding and find similarities and differences in the interpretation of data, two skilled qualitative researchers were contacted. For this procedure, three meetings were conducted. The aim of the first meeting was to explain the research focus. The aim of the second meeting was to train them on how the three philosophies work with curriculum components. A transcript of an individual interview was given with the components' characteristics for coding (See Appendix F). They were not given any example of the researcher's coding

in order to see the way they would code and interpret data. After receiving their coding via email, a third meeting was conducted to discuss decisions made regarding analysis. This step helped to verify whether or not these two experts would agree with the coding process (Houghton et al., 2013:14). In addition, these two researchers added their thoughts about what they gathered from the participants' transcripts. An example of their coding can be found in Appendix E.

One of these skilled qualitative researchers was contacted again in a different phase. The reason for contacting this qualitative researcher was that she had 20 years of experience in teaching English. Thus, it was thought that this present research would be relevant to her field. Once all coding of interviews and documents had been finalized, everything was sent to the skilled researcher to provide feedback and to get an overall view of the coding process. After receiving her initial thoughts via email, a meeting was conducted to discuss ideas and feedback about data given. This procedure helped to go through confusion and problematic matters while coding. It also helped to justify decisions and choices.

Triangulation

Another strategy employed to address the issue of credibility was triangulation.

Triangulation involves using different methods for data collection such as interviews, observation and documents (Shenton, 2004:65). Triangulation serves two purposes (Houghton et al., 2013:13). The first purpose is the confirmation of data, which means comparing data collected from multiple sources in order to explore the degree to which results can be confirmed. The second purpose is the completeness of data by gathering multiple perspectives from different sources in order to ensure that as complete a picture as possible of the topic of interest could be depicted. Using different methods to gather data can ensure that the data is found to be consistent, which can increase the credibility

of the results (Patton, 2002:559). For the current study, triangulation was addressed by using two data collection methods: individual interviews and document analysis. Data were confirmed and compared from these two sources.

Reflective commentary

Reflective commentary was a strategy employed to ensure the credibility of this study. Self-awareness on the part of the researcher throughout the research process, by recording personal contributions and personal responses, increased the credibility of the study as she considered herself to be part of the research instrument (Houghton et al., 2013:15). The commentary was used to record initial impressions and personal interests after each interview session and during the analysis process (Shenton, 2004:68). It was also used to relate data collection to the theoretical framework of the study, any issues encountered during the study and the rationale for decisions made (Houghton et al., 2013:15).

The role of the researcher

Although implementing a research project in an environment where one is employed has a comforting advantage of access to data and participants, it could raise the issue of subjectivity. The researcher may be influenced by her/his prior knowledge of her/his colleagues' views and beliefs and use such knowledge when interpreting interviews' transcripts. This may hinder the research and endanger relationships between the researcher and the participants. Berger (2015:220) argues that the position of the researcher in qualitative research may impact the knowledge production and thus may shape the findings and conclusions of the study. This argument is of particular relevance to this study. The researcher of the current study was an English lecturer at OTC (The setting of the present study) and had the experience of teaching ELT modules. Therefore, great importance to the issue of reflexivity has been attached to this study.

According to Berger (2015:220), reflexivity is viewed as ‘a process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of the researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome’. In order to remain reflexive when interviewing colleagues, the researcher paid particular attention to two issues: her role as a researcher and her experience in language learning and teaching.

First, the researcher kept questioning her role as a lecturer in the college during the fieldwork process. Further, in order to avoid directly and indirectly presenting her own views and acquiring participants’ views, the researcher spent minimum time at the college and left the country immediately after securing all participants’ interviews. Moreover, the researcher had been on leave from her job for two years by the time she started the fieldwork and would remain with this status in the following two years while undertaking her PhD research. In addition, some of the participants were new staff at OTC and did not know the researcher until they were recruited for the study. Thus, sharing their views and beliefs might feel more comfortable. More importantly, the researcher communicated to her colleagues (the research participants) that her role had changed from a lecturer to a researcher. And in order to access to participants and gain their trust, the researcher explained the research aim and how the research data would be used.

Second, the researcher remained alert to the risk of using her experience as the lens through which to view and construct meaning of the participants’ experience (Berger, 2015: 221). Before conducting this study, the researcher had certain views and beliefs about language learning and teaching, where she believed that a learner-centered approach was the best for students. Then, she realized that her perceptions were based on her own experience as a learner and as a teacher. In order to make the participants’

voices heard, the researcher analysed the data about their views and beliefs based on the framework used to analyse the data. During the process, the present study's supervisor helped the researcher to become more reflexive by encouraging her to construct meaning and draw conclusions from the data rather than making claims from her own knowledge and experience. During the research process, the researcher learnt how to become a reflexive thinker.

3.9.2 Transferability

Transferability is the extent to which the results of a qualitative research can be applied to other contexts with other respondents (Anney, 2014: 277; Shenton, 2004:69). According to Merriam (2002), knowledge learnt from an in-depth particular situation can be transferred and applied to another situation. According to Bitsch (2005: 85), the 'researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through 'thick description' and 'purposeful sampling'. In this research, the issue of transferability was addressed by giving detailed contextual information on participants and settings to enable the reader to transfer the results and conclusions to their own contexts (Shenton, 2004:69). In particular, the data collection methods employed and the contextual information about the two institutions and participants involved in the study were shared.

3.9.3 Dependability

Dependability is referred to as 'the stability of findings over time' (Bitsch, 2005: 86). In addressing the issue of dependability, the researcher should ensure that the results, interpretation and recommendations of the study are all supported by the data received from the participants of the study (Anney, 2014: 278). Two strategies were employed to ensure the issue of dependability in this study. The first strategy is the audit trail. It 'describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how

decisions were made throughout the inquiry' (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, in-depth coverage of methods was shared in order to show how data were collected, recorded and analysed. Another strategy was stepwise replication (Anney, 2014: 278). Stepwise replication is a procedure where one or more researchers analyse the same data separately and compare results. This was addressed by sharing all activities and decisions made in order to achieve the dependability of the inquiry. Merriam (2002) stresses that dependability is not about others replicating the same findings as the researcher, but it is about explaining how the researcher has arrived to these findings.

3.9.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to 'the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers' (Anney, 2014: 279). In order to ensure whether or not the data is confirmable, the researcher should ensure that the study findings reflect the ideas and experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's references or beliefs on the topic (Shenton, 2004: 72). Decisions made, interpretations and conclusions have to be acknowledged within the study report. Like dependability, one strategy that addresses confirmability is the audit trail. In this research, the issue of confirmability was addressed by sharing detailed step-by-step procedures of methodological description which enables the reader 'to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized' (Shenton, 2004: 73). Moreover, in order to increase confirmability, the reasons for using the basic interpretive approach for this study were explained.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research paradigm. It has also discussed the theoretical framework for this research and introduced the setting and participants, data collection and analysis methods, ethical issues and trustworthiness. The next chapter provides the findings and discussion.

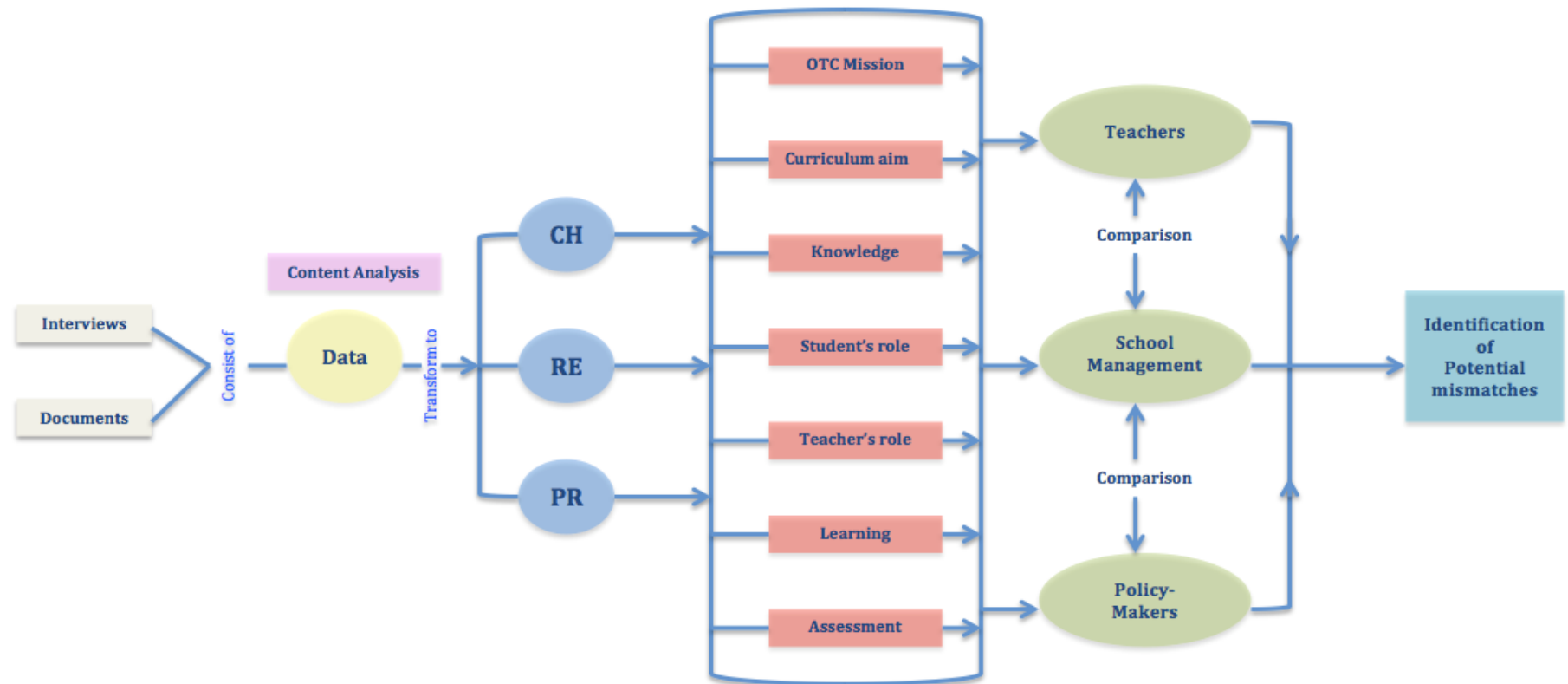


Figure 4 The Process of Data Analysis

Chapter Four: The Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The main aim of this research is to explore tensions and contradictions among higher education stakeholders in their approach to the ELT curriculum. In order to do this, the research project was set up in an Omani higher education institution. The general framework for the analysis of data is interpretive, where the data were regarded as a narrative about participants' positions and perceptions, not as a literal representation of reality. Within this framework, curriculum documents and interviews were analysed and compared with respect to a classification of three curriculum philosophies namely: classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism. Coding and analysis of data was built on the classification of the characteristics of the three curriculum philosophies concerning school mission, the aim of the curriculum, knowledge, learning, the role of the teacher, the role of the learner and assessment. This chapter is presented in two parts: (1) A discussion of the ELT curriculum planning process and the role of OAAA standards and (2) Stakeholders' thinking about the ELT curriculum.

4.2 A discussion of the ELT curriculum planning and role of OAAA standards

This section aims to highlight the tensions and confusion among stakeholders in their way of thinking about the ELT curriculum. It maps out the curriculum planning process and reveals details of the people involved in this process. In addition, it raises issues arising from the analysis, which will contribute to the discussion of other sections in this chapter. Two issues were put before stakeholders: the process of ELT curriculum planning and the role of OAAA standards in the planning of the ELT curriculum in the degree programme at OTC.

1.2.1 The process of ELT curriculum development and planning

Based on the interviews and document analysis, OTC appeared to follow the recommended criteria suggested by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). OAAA was founded in 2010 to establish a system that includes the standards that each HEI in Oman would follow in terms of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment for every learning area, including English language modules.

For the development of English language curricula, the standards given by OAAA are used as a basis on which the OTC curriculum development committee, including the assistant dean, develop the learning outcomes and the teaching approaches articulated in the programme handbook. Then, module coordinators and experienced teachers undertake the development of the ELT curriculum and relevant materials for each module. Following this, English teachers deliver the modules to students and suggest any amendments which might need to be made to the module, depending on students' level.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Tourism and Hospitality Management degree programme (THMP) was introduced in 2012. This programme includes four ELT modules: Academic English, Academic writing, Intensive reading and writing, personal development and communication. In the interviews, the participants were asked if they were part of the ELT curriculum design in the degree programme and to describe their role if they were.

From the analysis of the interviews, it appeared that the ELT curriculum committee consisted of one member of the administrators at OTC and the ELT teachers. It was surprising that teachers, who were heavily involved in curriculum development, had conflicting responses about whether there was a curriculum committee at the college or

not. One teacher explained that the process of curriculum planning went through a committee:

‘At the beginning of each semester, we have to look at the course components which include the assessment, the number of hours, the number of meetings, the number of materials that you need and then from there, you are free to recommend to the Committee, headed by (Sahila), if there is anything that you would like to amend in terms of specific outcomes’ (David² – ELT teacher)

However, another teacher said that there was no committee:

‘No there was no Committee. Actually how the things happen here is that you are coordinating, so you can do changes that you want as a coordinator, as long as you can rationalise things if asked. If you have certain rationale then you can do it and I can also tell here that to (Sahila)... So you go to her, you say, “I want to make these changes in the assessment” for example or, “I want to make the changes in the Curriculum because this and this, this and this...” she looks at things, if they are Okay she gives advice, if they are Okay then you go ahead with it. So when I handled Academic English as a Coordinator, because I taught Academic English for three semesters or four semesters but when I handled it as a Coordinator I made my own changes... You asked me about whether there is a Curriculum Design Committee or not. There is no Committee but the outcomes are there, so whenever we do anything we work according to the outcomes’ (Amal-ELT teacher).

This actually raises concerns about the ELT curriculum planning because based on the background of the mentioned head of ELT curriculum design committee, she was not an ELT expert nor an ELT teacher. She had no qualification in ELT, rather in quality assurance. There was no mention of experts in the field of English language teaching in the curriculum planning committee. There were only some consultations with the lecturers involved in the tourism and hospitality programme.

Furthermore, from teachers’ responses mentioned above, it appears that the process of curriculum planning involved: pre-specified learning outcomes and course descriptors and based on that, ELT teachers meet with the head of ELT curriculum committee to decide what activities and materials are to be used for the modules. Members of this working team or committee had various background and experiences.

² Pseudonyms are used for all participants (See section 3.7 (Ethical issues))

Some ELT teachers were involved in the very beginning stage of determining the learning outcomes. Other teachers who joined the college later were invited to be part of designing materials based on the pre-specified learning outcomes. As some of the teachers commented:

‘...the learning outcomes are there, the course descriptions are there, the goals are there, then all you have to do is just create a handbook with detailed activities and hours and requirements based on those, which is good’ (David-ELT teacher)

‘I was given the module descriptive, for example, and based on that I was asked to prepare a completely new course, ...in coordination with the management and in coordination with the deputy dean, and our coordinators’ (Abdul-ELT teacher)

‘Then I started looking at..., you know a kind of outcomes for this course. So I looked at the outcomes. And I looked at the materials we have and the students’ needs. Then...preparing activities, tasks and getting tasks from here and there and putting them together’ (Ahmed-ELT teacher)

These three excerpts from teachers’ interviews suggested that the people who were involved in the curriculum were not there, so teachers made many changes every day. These changes were based on their way of thinking of the curriculum and their background experience, as this study will reveal later.

This process was to be more complicated than it appeared. ELT teachers did not only need to report any amendments and changes to the curriculum committee, they also needed the approval from the affiliated college, which is in this case Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) in Ireland. As one of the teachers explains:

‘Because the learning outcomes are actually approved by the DIT, as the Programme Overseer, they usually come here to meet us every – end of the year, every end of the school year and ... then we have to substantiate our suggestions why this specific part needs to be amended’. (David-ELT teacher)

This was confirmed by the chair of curriculum committee at OTC. Being the chair of the committee involved in the degree programme, including the ELT curriculum, Sahila explained the process of planning the curriculum. First, she described the old developed

programme as a ‘wish list’ which cannot be achieved without identifying the external institution before the start of curriculum planning. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all private HEIs in Oman have to have an academic affiliation with an external institution. In the case of OTC, DIT is the academic external institution that validates and awards all undergraduate programmes offered by OTC.

‘They had developed a curriculum for the first degree programme. However when I looked at it, ...I could immediately spot that there were going to be issues with that programme. That programme was developed by a group of academics...The problem there was we had not identified who we were going partner with, who was going to be the awarding body. So the curriculum was designed like a wish list of all the things that the staff here wanted, and their best experience of what they wanted, and what they thought the students should have, and what they thought the industry should have. So it was basically a wish list by staff. However there are some technical issues, legal issues also you want to consider when you are developing a programme. First of all who the awarding body should be is a consideration’ (Sahila- Administrator).

She added that various expectations need to be met in order to have a programme, including:

‘The Ministry of Higher Education and the Oman National Quality of Qualifications Framework, the OAAA. We need to meet local demands, the local industry. We need to put in the demands of student needs here locally. So that is a big...that is a lot of shoes to fill and lots of people to consider’ (Sahila- Administrator)

‘So keeping it all... it requires to have a very clear idea of what are your outcomes and how well will you achieve those outcomes... I sat with the individual teams, module teams. Even down to the level of module outcomes, I was involved. Basically because my experience as well previously has been a lot in programme development, programme review, programme validations. Institutional reviews, but both by OAAA as well as by foreign universities, international universities. While here they were not that exposed to that. Therefore I did involve myself even to the tiniest detail’ (Sahila- Administrator).

The learning outcomes were referred and aligned to the guidelines from the Omani National Qualifications Framework, National Qualifications Authority of Ireland (NQAI) and the Quality Assurance Agency, United Kingdom’ (AQAM – OTC document)

Based on the analysis of the documents and the interviews, the process of curriculum design appeared to be unsystematic and random. This confirms what was suggested in

the literature review in terms of the issue related to the application of the internationalisation strategy: the external affiliation. This concern was raised by Brandenburg (2012:171) when he pointed at the concerns related to the degree programmes which have to be conferred by the external HEI. One of these concerns was the risk of a random way of designing and delivering the programmes provided, as the inexperienced locals may not do the job.

The findings of the process of planning the curriculum also highlighted the dominance of high-level stakeholders in making decisions. This issue, as explained in the literature, causes conflicts in higher education. As the findings suggest, in planning the curriculum, government documents and the international HEIs influence the decisions without considering other stakeholders. This concern was highlighted by Donn & Al Manthari (2010) as high-level stakeholders enforce a certain view of education and support adopting western practices, as this study will highlight later.

Considering the importance of the curriculum planning process, it was interesting to find that policymakers had no idea of what the process of curriculum design involves.

Amanda, a policymaker at OAAA, worked as a consultant at OAAA and was brought to Oman to develop the Institution of Standards document. She also conducted quality assurance visits to evaluate HEIs against institutional standards. The analysis of the interview with Amanda showed that she had no clue of what curriculum planning in the degree programmes involves. This means that it was up to the HEIs to plan the curriculum as there were no guidelines regarding this matter.

Approach

Based on the analysis of the interviews, it appears that ELT curriculum planning is objectives-driven, which reflects a reconstructionist approach (Clark, 1978: 15). The curriculum planning starts with stating objectives which are expressed in behavioral

terms. The selection of content is derived from an analysis of learners' objective needs. The elements of knowledge are devised in a linear progress through situations and language exponents sequenced from the simple to the more complex, building up towards the desired goals. In order to determine the achievement of the behavioral objectives, assessment is determined prior to the start of the course. These are the major characteristics of an 'objective-driven' approach to curriculum design (Clark, 1987:16), as explained earlier in this section by the chair of the curriculum committee and the ELT teachers.

One of the administrators explained that the first step in the curriculum design process was defining 'occupational standards' which refer to knowledge and skills that learners need to perform effectively in their future work.

'The first step is to define the occupational standards. So once you define the occupational standards you know which areas are really in need. Based on that one, based on the areas identified, these are the occupational standards required, then you have to develop Curricula based on those areas of occupational standards' (Qader)

He explained that a needs analysis had to be done in order to know the learners' needs:

'You have to read the trends of the market and where we are heading and based on that one you have also to anticipate what sort of new knowledge and skills are required in five years to come. So once your graduates are graduating up to five years' time, they will have that knowledge required at that time, not based on current information that we have received. So anticipation and reading the future is extremely important in order to develop appropriate training and curricular and training programmes.' (Qader)

Then, ELT teachers are involved in preparing the elements of knowledge:

'So I looked at the outcomes. And I looked at the materials we have and the students' needs. Then...preparing activities, tasks and getting tasks from here and there and putting them together' (Ahmed)

'...the learning outcomes are there, the course descriptions are there, the goals are there, then all you have to do is just create a handbook with detailed activities and hours and requirements based on those, which is good' (David)

In addition, each of the four ELT courses in the THMP is a prerequisite for the following course. Therefore, courses had to be planned in a linear fashion. The content is

sequenced from part-skills to whole skills, and from simple to complex. The methodology lays stress on part-skill practice, the rehearsal of goals, and the mastery of predetermined criteria. Assessment is criterion referenced and concerned to show what learners have mastered and at what levels (Clark, 1987).

ELT is given an important space in the degree programme. Its importance, as explained in the literature review, comes from the need for graduates to communicate in English. However, as argued earlier, the ELT field has a different way of planning and thinking compared to other subjects. The literature is rich in different ways and approaches related to ELT planning. There are three widely discussed language curriculum design models suggested by Brown (1995), Richards (2001), and Paul Nation and John Macalister (2010). These different models have caused no consensus about the best way of ELT but they break down the process of curriculum design into elements. These elements help to determine what students should learn in terms of knowledge, skill, and values, what experiences should be provided, and how the teaching and learning process can be planned and evaluated (Richards, 2001:2). The issue of concern here is the absence of ELT guidelines for ELT teachers. This is an important issue that needs emphasizing as tension and confusion would occur in the interpretation of the curriculum, as will be seen in the next section.

From the interviews, it seemed that the team involved in planning the ELT curriculum had a superficial understanding of ELT principles. The team appeared to make changes and amendments without clear principles. This random way of ELT curriculum planning could affect the overall framework of the components of curriculum. As will be seen later, there seemed to be less emphasis on curriculum content and details about instruction. The main focus was on the standards. The discussions about curriculum components in section 4.3.2 will reveal the effects of the philosophical influences on the

process of curriculum planning on of ELT curriculum. It will clarify and add evidence of lack of open discussion about the curriculum among people who are involved in the ELT planning.

1.2.2 Perception on the role of OAAA standards

As stated in Chapter Three, in order to improve the quality of Omani tertiary education, and align it to international/global values, the government in 2010 established the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). The mission of the OAAA is to ensure that Omani higher education institutions meet international standards in the quality of education they provide. This has brought drastic changes in all aspect of education including the curriculum development. The English language curriculum in higher education was accordingly included under a new principle of curriculum. This has brought a change in curriculum aims, content, methodologies and assessment. People involved in making decisions about these curriculum components are crucial.

From the evidence of the interviews and documents analysis, the ELT curriculum conformed generally the OAAA standards. The curriculum framework and school practices are required to follow the practices recommended. In order to find out how people involved in ELT curriculum design perceive OAAA standards, the participants were asked the following question: What do you think of OAAA standards? If you were in a senior position, would you make any changes?

According to Amanda, an expatriate consultant at OAAA and responsible for designing standards, OAAA standards works as a guidance for institutions:

‘...standards drive behaviour and, once these standards are out there and the standards must be met, the institutions will make sure that they implement the appropriate policies and support and approaches to make sure that they meet the standard, and that’s why standards are important. So standards aren’t about standing over someone with a big stick but it’s about driving behaviour, and if that’s the end destination that you want to reach you have to show the path’(Amanda-Policymaker).

According to Amanda, HEIs are assessed against these standards and are being given affirmations and recommendations. However, according to her, these standards do not specify how teaching and learning is supposed to be or how curriculum planning should be. The next section gives clear evidence about Amanda's view of curriculum, which came from her personal views and were not based on any policy document.

When Amanda was asked whether there was a document that gave institutions a conceptual framework for the ELT curriculum, she actually raised concerns about this matter. She pointed out that the only English language document available for the degree programme is the Student Entry Standards (SES). The SES reflects international norms for English language proficiency in similar higher education programmes, which are applied nationally and internationally. Pointing at the differences in terms of the English language preparation of students locally and internationally, Amanda said:

‘At the moment most programs are actually going to really struggle with that because the international norm would be at least 5.5 and the national norm is 5. So there will have to be a bit of a transition period... If we want the programs that are delivered in Oman to be of an international standard they must meet international norms’ (Amanda-Policymaker).

‘The aim would be to make sure that the students are of an intentional standard when they graduate, so if they're of a national standard for the entry, which is IELTS Level 5, but then of an international standard pushing up towards a 6 or 6.5, that is what would be the ideal and that's what will help Omani qualifications to be recognised internationally’ (Amanda-Policymaker)

This was confirmed by an OAAA document,

‘The normal route for admission to the BSc (Hons)/Diploma programmes is a pass in OTC's Foundation Programme. Direct admission to the BSc (Hons)/Diploma programmes (i.e. without the Foundation Study at OTC) will involve a pass in the placement test or a score of 5.5 in IELTS or an equivalent’ (AQAM)

The concern of students' lack of preparation in terms of English language was confirmed by other stakeholders, as well:

‘I think it's pretty easy to determine that most students aren't ready to perform on

an academic level, certainly in English' (John – Administrator)

Based on the analysis of the curriculum planning process and approach and the role of OAAA standards, it appears that there were various challenges affecting the ELT curriculum at OTC. It appeared that the stakeholders involved in the ELT curriculum did not go through a structured way of planning the curriculum. They also raised concerns about the planning process and the OAAA standards. The effect of the imported accreditation seemed to affect the process.

Details revealed from the analysis of interviews and documents about OAAA standards showed that there were challenges and a superficial way of looking at programme planning, including ELT. These challenges affected the ELT curriculum enormously as tensions and confusion were clearly evident among stakeholders. The next section gives details about these tensions, as various interpretations about ELT curriculum were aroused.

4.3 Stakeholders' thinking about the ELT curriculum

The previous section clearly states that decisions made by people who were involved in the ELT curriculum are shaped by their own background and experiences. No matter how many sources of knowledge they draw on or how many authorities they listen to, their decisions are based on values, beliefs and attitudes they have developed, involving their knowledge and interpretation (Ornstein, 1999:6). This section aims to reveal stakeholders' thinking about the ELT curriculum. It will be divided into two subsections. The first will deal with the overall thinking of the ELT curriculum. The second one will compare the following curriculum components among the three levels of stakeholders (policymakers, administrators and ELT teachers): school mission, aim, knowledge, learning, student, teacher and assessment. The findings in each component

will identify contradictions and consider on how individuals positioned themselves towards each of the philosophies.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, Venn diagrams and bar charts were used to visualize data in this study. These figures will show the overlapping thinking of stakeholders at OTC. The first section describes the overall thinking of ELT curriculum.

4.3.1 Overall thinking of ELT curriculum

Taken as a whole, the findings of the study seem to show that the RE and PR philosophies were the most popular perspectives among the stakeholders. The majority of stakeholders seemed to favour the RE philosophy in terms of the school mission, curriculum aims, knowledge and assessment. On the other hand, the majority seemed to favour the PR philosophy for the components of learning, the role of the student and the role of the teacher. Table 1 shows the most popular philosophies for the seven different components of the ELT curriculum and the percentages of stakeholders who considered those philosophes.

Curriculum component	Most popular philosophy	CH	RE	PR	CH+RE	CH+PR	RE+PR
School mission	RE	11%	84%	5%	0%	0%	0%
Curriculum Aim	RE	7%	75%	14%	0%	4%	0%
Knowledge	RE	7%	76%	11%	2%	3%	1%
Learning	PR	19%	14%	49%	5%	8%	5%
Student's role	PR	7%	10%	42%	14%	16%	11%
Teacher's role	PR	20%	20%	56%	3%	8%	3%
Assessment	RE	4%	73%	9%	8%	3%	3%

Table 15 Most popular philosophies for seven different components of curriculum as viewed by stakeholders involved in the ELT curriculum

The high percentages for the RE philosophy would indicate that stakeholders thought that social change happens through education, which is planned to lead towards certain agreed goals. The emphasis is on the practical relevance of the curriculum to the social

goals of the nation (Clark, 1987: 93). Similarly from the RE standpoint, 76 percent of the stakeholders believed that knowledge is goal-centered and derived from an analysis of the learner's objective behavioral needs. Another component that the majority of stakeholders viewed from the RE perspective is assessment. Most of them (73%) believed that the purpose of assessment should be to determine what students can and cannot do, and how well they perform against predetermined criteria.

When it came to learning, however, 49% of stakeholders favoured the PR philosophy perspective for learning. They believed that learning is seen as a natural process, going through stages of development. Moreover, on the role of the student, the PR perspective was also the most popular viewpoint among stakeholders. 42% viewed the role of the student as a process in which learners learn how to learn by their own efforts. In doing so, the learner is seen as a whole person rather than a disembodied intellect or a skilled performer. Another component that the majority of stakeholders viewed from a PR perspective is the role of teacher. 56 percent of stakeholders conceptualized the teacher as a facilitator of learning and a responder to learner needs.

As these findings suggest, the ELT curriculum is viewed from a multi-curriculum philosophy approach, which emphasises reconstructionism and progressivism. These findings are not surprising. The adoption of western practices, which reflects the PR approach in terms of learning, the role of student and the role of teacher has been emphasized in the recent reforms in higher education. School mission, curriculum aim, knowledge and assessment also represent the country's focus on the economy and on developing skills, all of which represent an RE approach. In order to deal adequately with the multi-curriculum view, there follows a short section discussing overlapping philosophies.

4.3.1.1 A discussion on overlapping Philosophies

Ornstein writes ‘too much emphasis on any one philosophy may do harm and cause conflict’. There is a need to be open to new ideas and insights that may lead to a revision or refinement of a particular philosophy. He suggests searching for the middle ground where there is no extreme emphasis on one philosophy but serving the needs of learners and society. This implies that in order to bridge the gap between the needs of curriculum content, society and learners, the curriculum design process needs a great deal of thinking and consideration. Moreover, Nation and Macalister (2010) point out that adopting one fixed methodology will always be open to criticism. They suggest instead that various principles can form the basis of the curriculum.

As seen in the previous section, there are overlapping curriculum philosophies underlying the ELT curriculum. There follows a discussion of positive and negative views on the matter.

Different studies have also acknowledged that there are overlapping curriculum philosophies underlying the ELT curriculum. There follows a discussion of positive and negative views on the matter. Mnguni (2013) conducted a study to investigate the underlying philosophy of a biology curriculum in South Africa. Document analysis was used as method for the analysis. An Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) and a Biology curriculum were used as data sources. Open-ended questions were used to analyse the curriculum document. Results of the study revealed that Biology has a multi-curriculum philosophy approach which emphasizes content-based and learner-based approaches. This content-based approach is observed with respect to the discipline-specific knowledge taught in the curriculum and the learner-based approach is observed with respect to students and teachers’ roles during instruction. Although the author finds an obvious overlap between curriculum approaches, a society-based approach is the least

observed. Despite the importance of adopting content-based and learner-based approaches in the curriculum, the author argues that the lack of society-based approach principles in the curriculum may have negative consequences. The author claims that the socio-scientific challenges facing South Africa need a greater emphasis on the society-based approach. In this way, students would be taught context knowledge and skills to enable them to promote their society and respond to the challenges. Moreover, the author points out that a lack of a distinct philosophy means that the teachers are left to define the overall objective of education by themselves. The finding suggests that all three philosophical approaches are important in order to ensure a worthwhile curriculum and a shortage of principles of one approach can affect achieving the objectives of education.

In a similar study, Tzotzou (2014) critically analysed and evaluated two language curricula on the basis of their philosophical and educational orientation. Document analysis was used as a tool for analyzing documents and two official documents were used for the analysis. Findings revealed that the two curricula are made up of different ideas, beliefs, values and assumptions. Their content, organization and objectives differ significantly, being influenced and shaped by society, culture, philosophy and the nature of knowledge. The analysis of the documents showed that the old curriculum follows the classical humanism principles. It emphasizes what should be taught and learnt, the objectives and content are general and it gives prominence to learning grammatical forms and structures. Learners are taught limited vocabulary items and speaking topics related to their interests and experience, as well as basic grammar and syntax; they are asked to produce native-like pronunciation and to read a limited range of texts in nature and content. It is also teacher/teaching centered as it emphasizes what is to be learnt and stresses the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge. The researcher describes the old

curriculum as 'fixed', 'rigid' and 'static' based on poor and superficial planning. On the other hand, the new curriculum, unlike the old curriculum, comprises two educational orientations: reconstructivism and progressivism. Regarding reconstructivism, it is goal oriented and it emphasizes the needs of the society. It has clear, measurable and achievable objectives that guide the teacher and the learner. By relying on progressivism, the new curriculum adopts a learner-centered approach to language teaching as it emphasizes what is to be learnt. It takes into consideration the learner's development both as an individual and as a social being. Furthermore, it promotes the learner's active role and autonomy by emphasizing the learning process and creating a context in which the teacher and the learner work together. It emphasizes the role of the teacher as a creator and decision maker.

The author criticizes the classical humanism philosophy without giving reference to the other characteristics of this philosophy in the curriculum. It can be argued that there are various values of classical humanism, which can be used to promote students' learning and to solve today's issues. As mentioned earlier, classical humanism helps students to relate knowledge to new contexts through problem solving and inquiry. Describing the curriculum as 'fixed', 'rigid' and 'static' shows that classical humanism is limited and there is an assumption that it cannot be used solely in a particular curriculum. On the other hand, the author provides evidence that using more than one philosophy in a particular curriculum can help in promoting students' learning.

Marulcu & Akbiyik (2014) conducted a survey-type study to explore curriculum philosophies of 242 pre-service teachers enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a faculty of education in a Turkish university. The findings of the study show that the pre-service teachers preferred different philosophies depending on the concepts of school, learning, knowledge, and evaluation. Regarding the school concept, the survey

respondents preferred philosophies that represent social perspectives and only a small number of the participants placed importance on making schools enjoyable places for learners or academic disciplines. These findings indicate that the survey respondents probably believe that the school mission is to educate learners in order to construct a better society. In terms of teacher concept, the result shows that respondents gave equal importance to all philosophies' perspectives. They perceived teachers as instruments for preparing learners for society, for solving the problems of society, and also for transmitting knowledge. Although participants perceived knowledge from a social perspective, they gave importance to its academic aspect. The authors imply that candidates consider the curriculum as an instrument to transmit knowledge from one generation to another for solving social problems, for raising members of society and for transmitting accumulated knowledge. The researchers connected the findings of their study, especially teachers' choice of philosophy, to the trend of globalization which has been experienced in the Turkish society. They explained that most of curricula around the world are being driven by today's scientific and technological progress, the global economy and culture. These curricula stress the need to prepare students in a competitive global economy. The findings suggest that the choice of curriculum philosophy can be affected by the social changes occurring in the world.

However, other studies argue that each subject area ought to have a distinct curriculum philosophy which frames the subject in terms of content knowledge, learning, teaching, assessment as well as learning outcomes. In their study, Zidonis & Dilenschneider (2009) propose a potential curriculum based on the philosophical foundations in a tertiary level institution in Japan. Specifically, they propose a curriculum based on the framework of classical humanism for first year students followed by progressivism for second year students. Applying classical humanism helps the first year students as they

enter the university lacking academic skills. Thus the focus is on enhancing their background knowledge and essential skills of their specializations in the first year, helping them to develop themselves to the second year. The assessment of this philosophy helps students to master the concepts and principles before they move to the second year. He suggests that the syllabus introduces new vocabulary, grammar or expressions every week. In terms of progressivism for second year students, the focus is on students' learning experiences instead of mastering facts. The teacher's job is to find activities that challenge students to solve real life situations. Regarding assessment, students can be graded based on their participation and reflections on the activities they engage in. Although adopting one fixed philosophy has not been welcomed by some researchers as mentioned earlier, the author's justification for proposing the two philosophies can be viewed as meeting learners' needs at different stages of their growth and development. The author does not indicate that he prefers a specific philosophy nor does he criticize any of them. However, it can be argued that intellectual growth and development should be encouraged in all the levels of learning, instead of limiting it to a specific level.

This section (5.2) provided an idea of the overall picture of the philosophical beliefs of people at the three levels of organisation concerning the ELT curriculum at OTC.

However, these findings do not represent the philosophical views of each level separately for each component of the ELT curriculum. Neither do these findings represent individuals within each level of organisation. The next section highlights the tensions within each component among each level of stakeholder and within individuals at each level of organisation.

4.3.2 The philosophical influences of curriculum components for each level of organisation

This section highlights the tensions within each component among each level of stakeholder and within individuals at each level of organisation. The following curriculum components will be compared among the three levels of stakeholders (policymakers, administrators and ELT teachers): school mission, aim, knowledge, learning, student, teacher and assessment. In discussing these components, there will be a significant reference to the work of Clark (1987). As discussed in the methodology chapter, this is one of the few works in the ELT curriculum philosophies.

4.3.2.1 School mission

The question here was: What do you think is the purpose of the degree programme, why do you think students come to your college/university to do tourism and hospitality degrees?

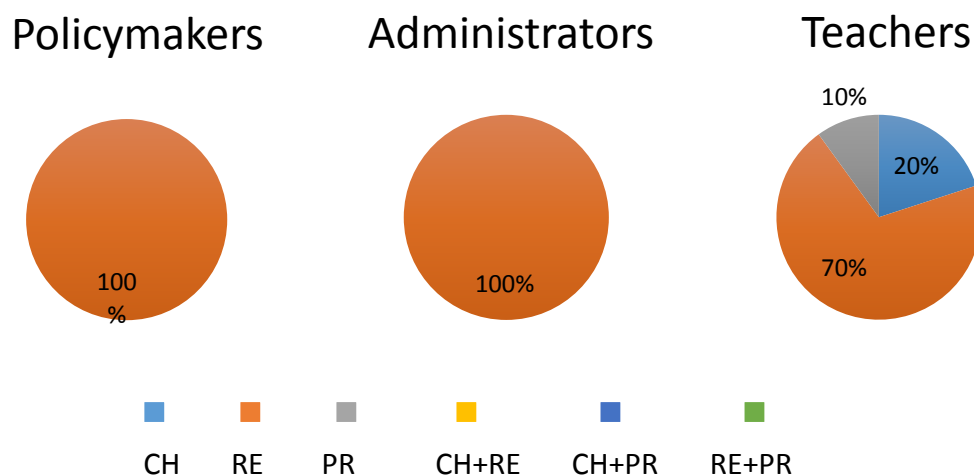


Figure 5 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the school mission

In Figure 5, the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning school mission is shown. For the school mission, the RE philosophy was overwhelmingly the most popular perspective among the three levels. All administrators and policymakers (100%) view the school mission from RE perspectives. They appear to believe that the school mission

of OTC is to prepare a skilled workforce that can meet the needs of the economic development in Oman. Contrary to the overall thinking about the school mission, the figure also indicates that 30% of teachers viewed the school mission from different perspectives, CH (20%) and PR (10%).

Regarding this component of the curriculum, the results indicate that most participants viewed the school mission from a Reconstructionism philosophy point of view. As explained in the last chapter, this philosophy represents a social perspective. This suggests that all stakeholders are aware of the college's mission, which is, as mentioned in the college's website:

‘To provide outstanding education with the objective of producing graduates with the professional and personal skills required for their careers and to contribute effectively to the development of the tourism and hospitality industry’ (OTC website)

This indicates that the mission of schooling is viewed as one by which to raise well-skilled citizens who can participate in the growth of the economy.

Similar to the belief in the management level, policymakers in the OAAA document under the title: Standard 1 governance and management: Criterion 1.1 mission, vision and values, it is pointed out that:

‘The Mission, Vision and Values effectively guide the HEI, are consistent with the HEI's purpose and its ability to meet the national priorities of Oman, and community expectations’ (ISAM).

Similarly, other stakeholders believed the same about school mission:

‘Because tourism and hospitality...is going to be important in the future for economic growth...so you want to make sure that the tourism...is meeting market needs’ (Amanda - Policymaker).

‘Because of the needs, there is really a need of young Omanis in the labour market and right now almost 90% of people who are working in this sectors are ex-patriots’ (Qader - Administrator).

‘To be prepared to join the tourism and hospitality sector later. And I think they can be like the source for the sectors in the labour market’ (Zyad - ELT teacher).

Moreover, results showed that only a minority of the teachers viewed the school mission as promoting student's development (the PR philosophy) or transmitting the essence of the discipline to students and acculturating them into a discipline (the CH philosophy). This appears to indicate that this minority of teachers think differently from the mainstream. The following two examples illustrate this difference in thinking. In the first example, Beth seems to think that to think that students' have a different way of thinking about tourism that needs to be changed:

‘To change the mentality of many people in the country to show them that tourism is all not what is it is set out to be’ (Beth-ELT teacher).

Thus, for this teacher, the mission of the school is perhaps to transmit traditions and values of the discipline (Tourism, in this case) so that students become aware of them. It seems that this teacher views knowledge as ‘a set of revealed truths, whose underlying rules and regularities should be studied and consciously mastered’ (Clark, 1987: 5).

In the second example, Gina made a particular use of the phrase ‘to make them aware’ indicating that she thinks that the school mission is to make ‘conscious awareness’ of ‘the particular knowledge elements to be learnt’, tourism in this case, so they would be able ‘acquire knowledge and to become consciously aware of the rules underlying it, in order to apply it in new contexts’ (Clark, 1987: 5):

‘To make them aware how to work in those specific areas..., what should be the international standards of welcoming the visitors and improving the tourism sector of Oman’ (Gina-ELT teacher).

Finally, the least selected philosophy was PR. The reference included:

‘How they can make meaning, raise their personality’ (Gina-ELT teacher).

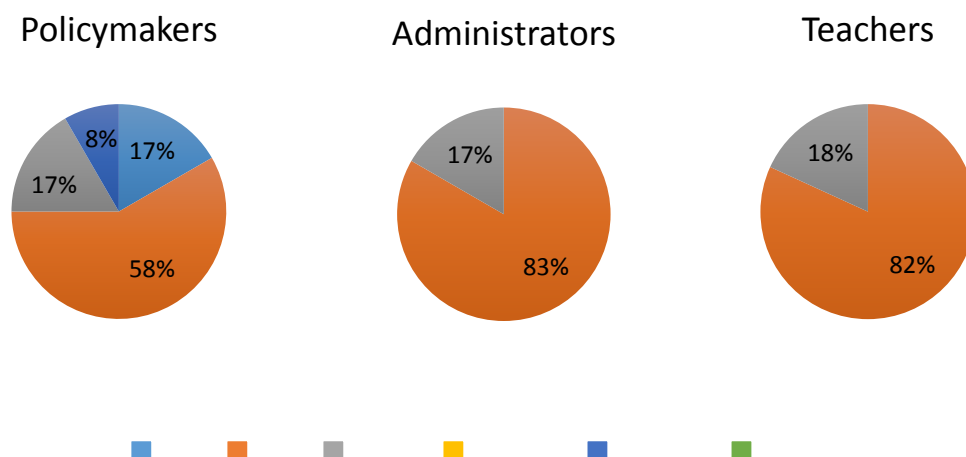
This reference indicates that this teacher views the school's mission from a learner-centered approach to education, which attempts to promote students' development and growth. This approach represents a PR perspective.

Overall, the findings indicate that the school mission reflects national priorities as

viewed by most stakeholders. As explained in the literature, tourism is mentioned in Vision 2020 as one of the sectors for the diversification of the economy. Thus, it is not surprising to find that most of the participants view the school mission as aiming to produce skilled citizens who contribute to the development of the economy. The findings also appear to confirm what the literature suggested, that higher education in Oman reflects an economic rationale, where competitiveness is emphasized. On the other hand, the cultural and academic rationales appear to be missing or less emphasized, which raises a concern that vision 2020 objectives are not being entirely implemented. The absence of two main objectives of vision 2020 as the growth of individuals and the empowerment of Arab Omani culture from the school mission means that it is not reflecting the overall purpose of higher education indicated in vision 2020. Moreover, the fact that some teachers viewed the school mission from a different perspective indicates that there is a lack of communication from the upper management, which had led to different interpretations of the school mission. This confirms what Donn & Al Manthri (2010) highlighted in terms of the influence of policymakers where the other low-level stakeholders have less participation.

4.3.2.2 *The aim of the ELT curriculum*

The second question was: what do you think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?



CH RE PR CH+RE CH+PR RE+PR

Figure 6 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the aim of the ELT curriculum

In Figure 6, the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the aim of the ELT curriculum is shown. For the aim of the curriculum, the RE philosophy was the most popular perspective, (58%) for policymakers, (83%) for administrators and (82%) for teachers. The second favoured philosophy is PR (17%) for policymakers and administrators and (18%) for teachers. The figure also indicates that policymakers favoured the aim of the curriculum from a CH perspective (17%). Interestingly, unlike policymakers, none of the administrators and teachers viewed the aim of the curriculum from CH perspectives.

The figures also indicate that there were differences in thinking about ELT curriculum not only across levels but within levels. Figure 7 and 8 indicate that policymakers and administrators favoured the aim of the curriculum from different perspectives. Figure 7 shows that individuals at the policymakers level viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum differently. While OAAA documents viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum from the perspectives of the three philosophies, Amanda viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum from a CH and RE perspectives only.

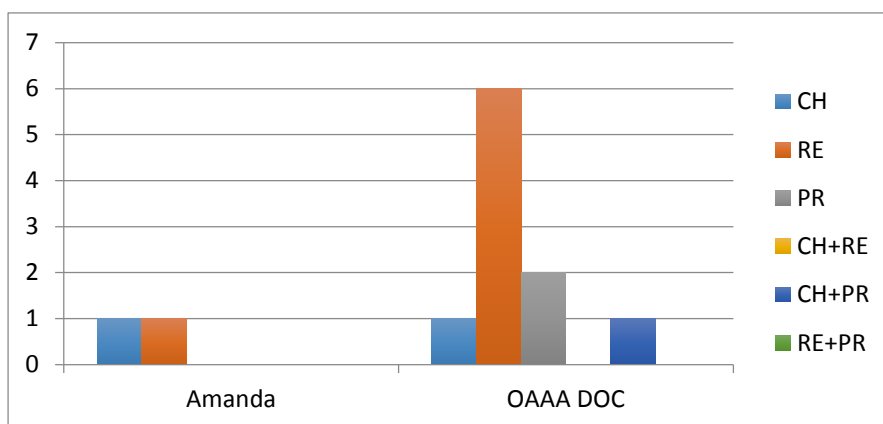


Figure 7 Distribution of perspectives of individuals at the policymaker level concerning the aim of the ELT curriculum

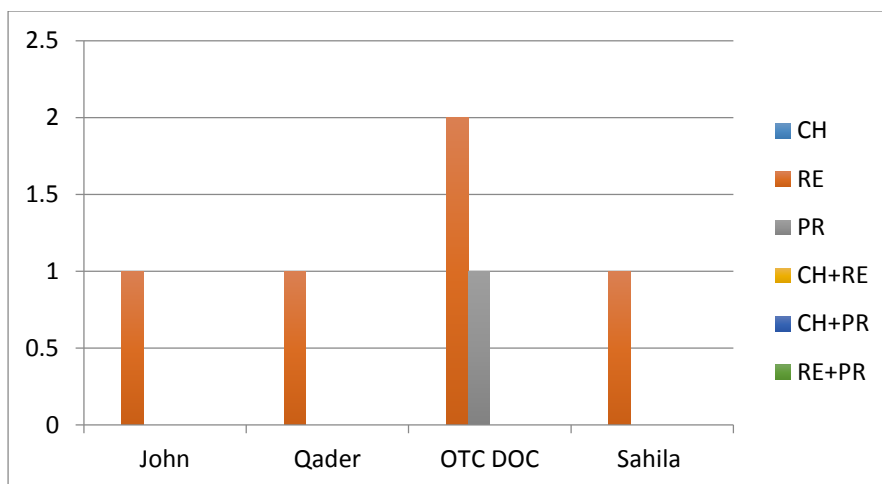


Figure 8 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the management level concerning the aim of the ELT curriculum

Figure 8 also shows that individuals at the management level viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum differently. While OTC documents viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum from the perspectives of the RE and PR philosophies, administrators viewed the aim of the ELT curriculum from an RE perspective only. The issue of concern is that some of those administrators were part of designing OTC documents, as discussed in section (4.2.1).

As shown in the results, RE was the dominant perspective for the aim of the curriculum.

According to OTC documents:

‘...language skills for academic purposes are a particular challenge in Oman and hence supporting modules have been made a compulsory part of the programme. The new programme includes four new English language modules at years 1 and 2 which are aimed at the development of academic writing and reading skills, communication and personal development’ (THMP handbook).

This statement indicates that the aim of ELT curriculum is to build language skills for academic purpose, which reflects an RE perspective,

The same document on a different page points out that:

‘In order to develop and enhance communication skills for academic purposes and in the workplace, English Language modules in years 1 and 2 are a compulsory part of the programme’ (THMP handbook).

This statement indicates that the aim of the ELT curriculum is to develop skills for

professional purposes, as well.

Although it is mentioned in different pages in the document, it appears that the aim of the curriculum reflects the RE perspective in terms of building and developing skills for both academic and professional purposes. This indicates that in order for students to be able to communicate in academic and professional purposes, they need to develop and enhance particular skills in English language.

Interestingly, it was found that stakeholders were divided with regard to two aims mentioned in the THMP handbook. In one hand, some RE references included statements which suggest that the aim is to provide students with language skills for academic purposes only, for example:

‘...the moment the national IELTS level is 5 and you would expect that a graduate would graduate with at least a 6 or a 6.5, and so I think that the courses or the modules are to ensure that students continue to build in their English Language skills’ (Amanda - policymaker).

‘I think it’s pretty easy to determine that most students aren’t ready to perform on an academic level, certainly in English... and that bridging continues in...the undergraduate or the diploma programme’ (John - administrator).

‘To help them in the other modules, not learning the language for the sake of the beauty of the language but because they need it, because it is the medium of instruction’ (Amal – ELT teacher)

References such as ‘raise their skills’, ‘continue to build their skills’ and ‘provide students with the skills’ are followed by phrases such as ‘to cope with other modules’, ‘to help them in the other modules and ‘to understand other modules’. This suggests that the aim of the curriculum is about passing other courses and to assist with other modules, which implies a RE approach where students lack something and the ELT programme is consequently used to help them to cope with other modules. This indicates that English is used to master skills then to apply them in new contexts. The emphasis is on the practical relevance of the curriculum through equipping students through the language defined as for ‘academic’ purposes. The English language curriculum is used as a goal

to be achieved which is, in this case, passing the course modules in order to move to the next stage. Stakeholders are aiming to enable students to ‘use the language effectively for communication with other speakers of that language, both transacting the business of everyday living and in building social and personal relations’ (Clark, 1987: 15).

On the other hand, other stakeholders believed that it is for professional purposes only:

‘We have been engaged personally on – during interviews and so on and we know for sure that judgments on employment are based sometimes in most of the cases are on their communication skills... the majority of questions are related to how much these guys are able to interact with others. Are their communication skills good enough? Will they be able to write some simple reports and so on if we recruit them? And based on how is their attitudes based on language, again communication skills it reflects a lot of the attitudes and so on. So for this reason we are emphasizing now that English should be taught completely within the Degree level’ (Qader - administrator).

This suggests that the aim of the curriculum stresses that skills to be provided reflect ‘the learners’ objective communicative needs’ (Clark, 1978: 94) which they will use later when they start working in the tourism field. Thus, this perspective represents an RE philosophy which implies that ‘learners have to learn to recreate the exact speech patterns of the target language community’ (Clark 1987: 38).

As well as viewing the aim from an RE perspective, stakeholders viewed it from a PR approach suggesting that the aim of the curriculum is to provide students with learning experiences and to grow through these experiences:

‘The emphasis is on the types of experiences that students must have or must be provided to students’ (THMP handbook – OTC document).

And another view from a PR perspective, which aims to promote students to make personal meanings:

‘Make them engage and then can personalize these skills’ (David – ELT teacher)

As well as those viewing the aim of the curriculum from RE and PR perspectives, there were some stakeholders who viewed the aim from a CH perspective where the aim of the curriculum was to maintain and transmit (tourism) knowledge to learners:

‘To study their chosen field(s) of study in depth’ (ISAM – OAAA documents).

Overall, although the aim was viewed heavily from an RE perspective which is developing skills for academic and professional purposes, the findings indicate that some stakeholders viewed it from a PR perspective which is to provide students with learning experiences and to promote students to make personal meanings. As well as these two perspectives, the aim was also viewed from a CH approach, which was to maintain and transmit knowledge to learners. These findings concerning the aim were not surprising. Similar to the school mission, the findings indicate that the aim of the ELT curriculum reflects the national priorities which developing skilled citizen for the country. ELT is used as a way to build these skills and prepare them for their careers in the future. This again confirms what was suggested by the literature and indicates the empowerment of the economic rationale in higher education. The finding indicates that there is less emphasis on the humanistic education which empowers the growth of individuals. This means that vision 2020 objective of higher education as a promoter of developing humans is less emphasized. Like school mission, the different perspectives in viewing the aim of the curriculum among stakeholders indicate the lack of communication among them.

4.3.2.3 Knowledge prescribed

The question here was: Moving to a bigger picture, what do think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?

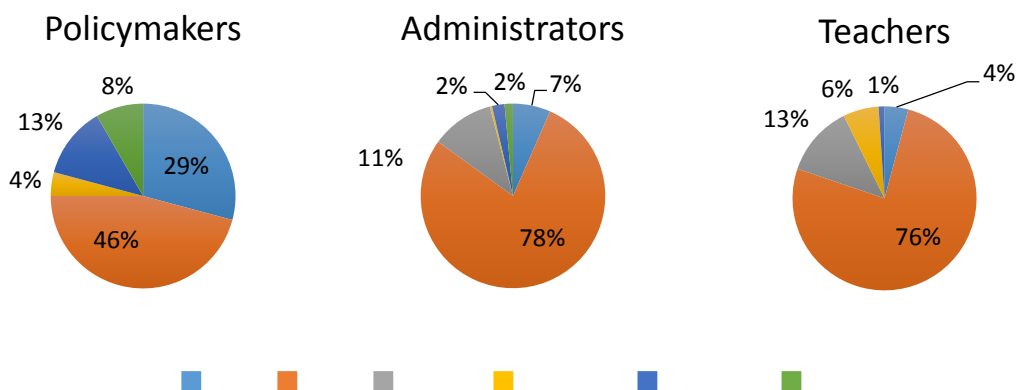


Figure 9 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning knowledge

In Figure 9, the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders about knowledge is shown. For the knowledge prescribed, the RE philosophy was the most popular perspective, (46%) for policymakers, (78%) for administrators and (76%) for teachers. Interestingly, while policymakers viewed the knowledge component from a CH approach as their second favoured perspective (29%), the PR appeared to be the second favoured perspective among administrators and teachers.

Regarding the component of knowledge, the results indicate that the nature of knowledge is society-oriented which represents an RE perspective. The society-oriented knowledge is based on the belief that ‘good habits have been set up of a particular behaviour, thus the global task will be performed without problems (Clark, 1987:18). Based on the economic and social rationale of higher education in Oman, this finding of the analysis of the documents and interviews appeared to be expected. However, stakeholders seemed to position themselves in different views. For example, according to the ISAM and NQF documents, three knowledge types were emphasized the most: Omani culture and traditions, the knowledge of academic skills and communication skills, meeting industry and community expectations. Examples of these three types of knowledge as mentioned in OAAA documents:

‘Graduates should understand the culture and traditions of Oman in general and in relation to their academic studies’ (NQF – OAAA document)

‘Graduates are able to communicate effectively orally and in writing’ (NQF – OAAA document)

‘The HEI understands the requirements of professional bodies and monitors its programs to ensure they are appropriately responsive to those requirements’ (ISAM – OAAA document)

Philosophically, these three statements represent a mixture of the three perspectives. The first statement indicates a CH perspective, where knowledge is to be passed from generation to generation, so cultural values are to be transmitted through education (Clark, 1987: 49). This means that the content, in this case is knowledge-oriented. The second statement reflects a mixture of RE and PR, where communication is key for the learner to develop as a skill or as an individual. The third statement reflects an RE approach where the focus is on the skills relevant to labour market requirements that need to be provided to learners.

Although these types could be viewed from a mixture of the three philosophies, it appeared that the emphasis on these types of knowledge indicates that knowledge is objective. Knowledge does not seem to take the form of personal meaning to learners, which would represent a PR view. It derives its value from its ability to fulfill needs of society, which indicate an RE perspective.

Similar to the school mission and the aim of the curriculum, the findings in the knowledge component show the expectation that higher education aims to provide skilled citizens in order to fulfil the needs of the society.

In seeing how these three types of knowledge play out in the ELT curriculum, an analysis of the content reveal some conflicts.

The first conflict that can be noted within individuals at the policymakers' level, Figure 10 shows that there were overlapping perspectives about the knowledge component in OAAA documents. While OAAA documents viewed the knowledge from a mixture of the three philosophies, Amanda viewed it from the RE perspective only.

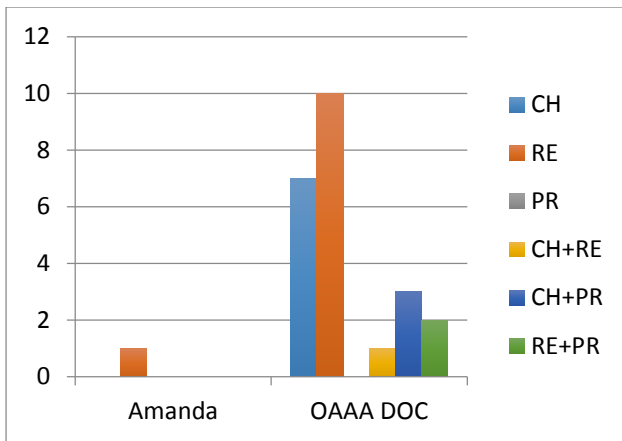


Figure 10 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the policymaker level about the learning process

Vision 2020 emphasizes the propagation of a national identity in higher education, included in the curriculum. In analysing the ELT curriculum documents, it does not appear that the Omani culture is promoted. Therefore, this shows that the cultural issue is not taken into account which, indicates a possible conflict with the objectives of Oman 2020, that Omani culture must be promoted. It also conflicts with the national qualification framework (NQF) document when the standards indicate the promotion of culture. It can be argued that the absence of a culture element in the curriculum can be because of the overriding need to meet the expectation of different upper-level authorities. This finding support the literature as the current purpose of higher education provision in Oman has been changed and redirected towards human resource development.

4.3.2.4 Learning

In terms of learning the question was: What is your impression about the state of learning that you see in your classroom? How do you think learning is taking place?

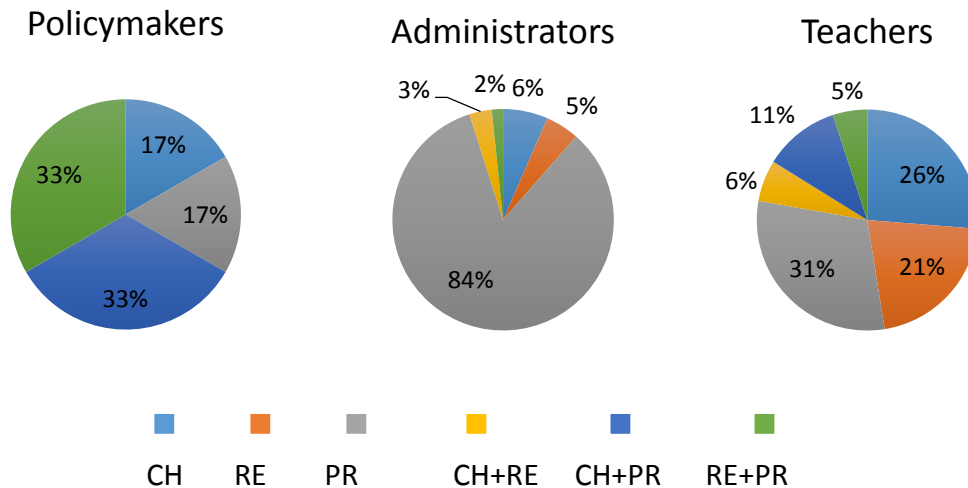


Figure 11 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning learning

Figure 11 shows the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders about learning. As seen in the figure, while policymakers favour the three perspectives nearly equally in the learning component, the PR perspective was the most favoured among administrators and teachers. Interestingly, the most dominant perspective in the previous components is seen as the least favoured (5%) among teachers and administrators.

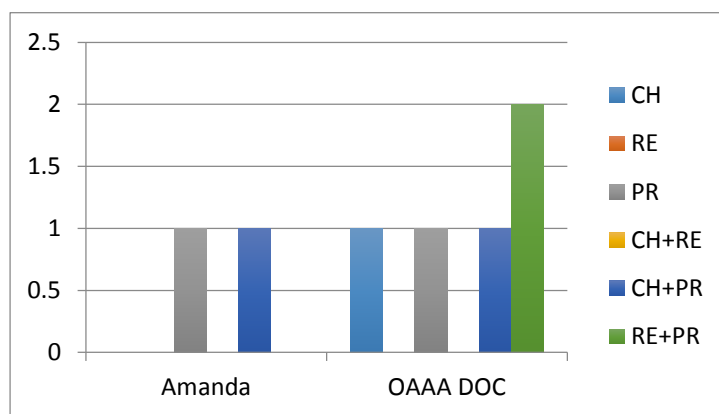


Figure 12 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the policymaker level about the learning process

Within individuals at the policymakers' level, figure 12 shows that there were overlapping perspectives about the learning component. While RE is the most dominant perspective in OAAA documents, the findings show that Amanda did not favour the RE perspective in her view about learning. The issue of concern here is that Amanda, based

on her background, played a central part in designing and planning the OAAA documents.

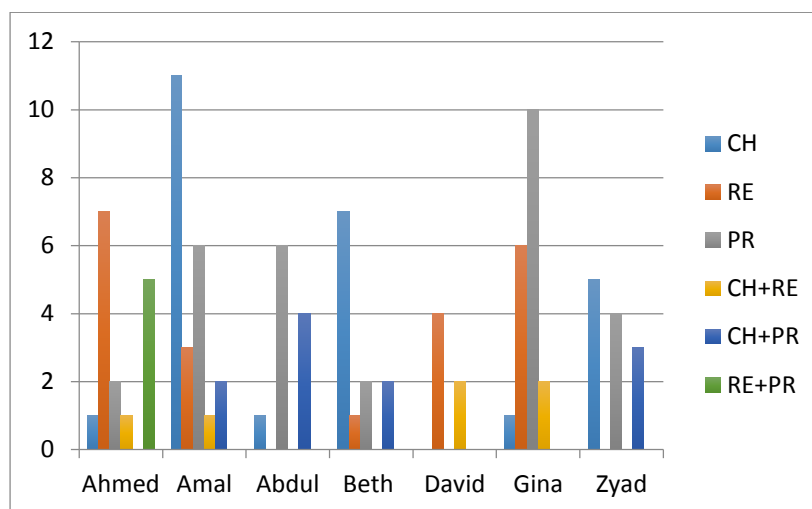


Figure 13 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the teacher level about the learning process

Like policymakers, there is a complex overlapping of philosophies among ELT teachers about the learning component. While Amal, Beth and Zyad favoured CH perspectives in their learning component, as shown in figure 13, Ahmed and David viewed the learning from a RE perspective. In contrast with the other two perspectives, Abdul and Gina viewed the learning from a PR perspective. Interestingly, although the figure shows that most ELT teachers had a mixture of all philosophies in their view of ELT learning, there were some teachers who seemed to be restricted to two or even one perspective. For example, Abdul did not view the learning from an RE perspective which favoured by other teachers. Another example is David who did not view the learning from a PR perspective which favoured the most by Abdul.

With regard to the learning process, it appears that the PR approach was more common among stakeholders. It is stated in the OAAA document that the HEI should have:

‘A defined and appropriate approach to teaching and learning which is effectively implemented. The approach reflects contemporary pedagogies’ (ISAM).

This means that the HEI has the freedom to choose the teaching and learning approach.

However, it further states that:

‘The HEI’s approach to teaching and learning enables students: to develop as independent learners,...and to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking...to ensure students are able to 'develop as learners' (ISAM).

This statement indicates that the OAAA suggests a mixture of both CH and PR approaches, where teaching and learning promote intellectual capacities and encourage individual growth in terms of students' being independent, critical and creative thinkers and learning how to learn. It also states that teaching and learning enable learners:

‘To study their chosen field(s) of study in depth’

This indicates that the content of certain knowledge should be transmitted.

Based on this, it appears that the OTC adopted, as indicated in OTC documents, the ‘student-centered approach’ which reflects the PR philosophy. Most of the administrators’ statements and phrases included

‘Stimulate an enquiring, analytical and creative approach’

‘Reflect the needs of students’,

‘Critical skills, creativity, independence, self-awareness’ (AQAM).

Based on the PR philosophy, learning and teaching focus on ‘providing conditions in which the mental process for spontaneous learning, re activated through engaging in communicative activity’ (Clark, 1987: 96). OTC justifies its decision to adopt this approach as ‘increasingly being encouraged in higher education. Research evidence in education supports the implementation of learner- centered approaches instead of instructor-centered approaches’ (AQAM). It can be argued that, based on the literature, learner-centered approach is a ‘western’ idea, which has been criticised in different contexts. Vinther & Slethaug (2013) argue that being away from national pedagogy ‘might well alter the coherence between teaching, pedagogy and the ideals of autonomy

and social involvement'. From the analysis, the adoption of such approach seems to cause confusion, as will be shown in this later in this section.

Another reason for viewing learning from this approach could be the external institution affiliation. According to Sahila and ISAM, the majority of students in secondary schools in Oman are more familiar with a teacher-centred learning experience and hence they find it difficult to embark on a student-centered approach in higher education. The affiliation with an international HEI:

'Require(s) to think for yourself so more very student centred independent thinkers, independent learning becomes a focus.' (Sahila-Administrator).

Under the title 'student-centered teaching' in the OTC document, it is states that:

'Within a student centered approach, instructors do not employ a single teaching method. This approach emphasizes a variety of different types of methods that shifts the role of the instructors as givers of information to facilitating student learning. The role of the instructor is facilitative rather than didactic and should focus on student learning' (AQAM).

This statement suggests that in the learning process, the teacher facilitates learning and the student has an active role. However, the analysis of the interviews with the ELT teachers shows a totally different picture. It is interesting to find that some teachers claim that they follow a student-centered approach in teaching while their practices reflect a CH approach. More details will be given in the next section.

Another issue concerning learning is critical thinking. Based on OAAA documents:

'The HEI's approach to teaching and learning enables students: to develop as independent learners, to study their chosen field(s) of study in depth, to make connections across the curriculum, and to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking' (ISAM)

This statement indicates that the approach of learning and teaching should develop students' critical thinking.

In AQAM (an OTC document), the term 'critically' is used in the learning outcomes under the knowledge and cognitive skills outcomes. It was mentioned two times in the

same learning outcome. There is no definition stated in the curriculum documents and its use in the learning. This means that the interpretation of the term depends on the people who will use.

‘The ability to critically review complex sequences of knowledge and evidence towards a specific purpose, demonstrating skills of critical reflection’ (AQAM).

In the literature review, it was mentioned that ‘critical thinking’ was promoted in the recent reforms in the Omani education. In the pre-tertiary education, critical thinking was one of the measures of learning. Oman 2020 and reforms promote critical thinking.

Although curriculum developers conform to the NQF in terms of learning outcomes, the term is not mentioned in the learning outcomes of the document.

Critical thinking is promoted in the degree programme and ELT module descriptors; however, it was not defined, which has led to confusion.

At each level, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies should enable the learner to develop and demonstrate the following learning outcomes (QAM, 2013: 8):

Type of outcome	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Knowledge and Cognitive Skills	The ability to comprehend specific information, using given principles and with detailed guidance;	The ability to analyse a range of ideas/information with guidance and towards a given purpose and arrive at relevant conclusions;	The ability to research, analyse, and evaluate a wide range of information and generate ideas with some guidance;	The ability to critically review complex sequences of knowledge and evidence towards a specific purpose, demonstrating skills of critical reflection;

Table 16 Critical thinking as described in the four levels of the degree programme

As shown in table 16, the document describes the learning outcomes in the four levels of the degree programme in terms of critical thinking. As explained in the previous chapter, the four ELT modules in the tourism and hospitality degree programme were taught in the first two levels: level 1 and level 2. As far as the ELT curriculum is concerned, critical thinking is guided in the first two levels where the four ELT modules are taught. The learner is able to ‘comprehend’ specific information in level 1 and to ‘analyse’

information in level two. Both levels require guidance from the instructor. It is not clear whether these two outcomes in the first two levels are part of critical thinking or not.

This means that there is ambiguity in these documents.

Moving from critical thinking as a confusing concept to the practices of ELT teachers.

While participants seem to accept the encouragement of a student-centered approach to learning (PR philosophy), their practices and views show a different path. Examples of this issue will be presented, where two ELT teachers' beliefs will be compared against their real practices and beliefs of other stakeholders.

Example 1: Beth

Beth is a 'western' English language teacher at OTC. She has been involved in teaching for ten years. She has a degree in hotel and restaurant management and she has worked in numerous hotels in Europe. On arriving in Oman, she took a pre-service training course (CELTA) in order to find a job, and has been teaching since then. At OTC, she is a lecturer in tourism and hospitality, however she also teaches language as well.

Beth has been involved in some capacity in ELT curriculum design. According to her, she assisted in compiling the curriculum, where the focus was mainly on specific outcomes. Yet, when she was asked about the OAAA standards which gave guidelines about teaching and learning, she showed that she had not looked at the OAAA standards, or at least not recently. She also seemed to link the standards with the assessment process:

‘I think they're there to set a particular standard ...before submitting exams a whole group of teachers would sit together from the committee and go through each exam and see if they're meeting a particular standard’ (Beth)

At the same time, she was allowed to change learning outcomes. Based on a NQF document,

‘The teaching, learning and assessment strategies should enable the learner to develop and demonstrate three types of outcomes: learner autonomy, knowledge

and cognitive skills and transferable skills and competencies’

Beth claimed that she took a student-centered approach. Describing her style of teaching and learning, Beth said:

‘...here we try and encourage students to be a little more independent not like spoon-fed the whole time. And, I try to keep my classes very student centred, not so much coming out of my mouth I tend to ask them a lot of question, I try to elicit information from them. And, I feel, we’ll we’ve seen actually, students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information’ (Beth)

However, content was certainly not negotiated with the students.

‘...had a content module like Introduction Tourism, Hospitalities semester one, we linked it with Academic English. They were, the teachers were sort of helping the students to show them how to reference, how to use transitioning words, cohesive devices and we were focusing on giving them the information. So, we worked together so that they could use all skills from both subjects to comply one assignment’ (Beth)

However, Beth's reported episode of one of her sessions proved that her approach had a different path.

Beth episode

‘I put them into groups or pairs to brainstorm the ideas then we wrote them all on the board what they said in groups and then I gave them the PowerPoint. So, we went through point by point, okay, what does this mean, can you give me an example of this? So, and in fact most of the ideas that they had matched what was on the PowerPoint, so this is the way it was. And, then we did an activity where they had to watch a video on a tourism product. So, then they had to watch the video and identify potential impacts of tourism on that project in the future, so they were able to apply the impacts that we discussed before that onto the project, plus give further examples as well’ (Beth).

The way she explained her teaching approach indicates that what she did was rather teacher-centred. Her teaching style is teacher driven, focusing on meeting the goals and objectives set by the teachers rather than set by the students based on individual needs.

The fact that in the teaching episode she describes, she created a Power Point presentation with ideas in it, before students engaged in the brainstorming activity, and used their ideas to confirm what she had already prepared, indicates that she had a

preconceived notion of what were the ‘right’ answers in this activity. This reflects a classical humanist where the teacher is the expert.

Taking Beth’s overall thinking about ELT curriculum, reflecting on table 17

Beth’s approach seems to be a mixture of reconstructivism (e.g., criterion based assessment, use of formative and summative assessment, use of group work, teacher as facilitator), and classical humanism (e.g., the focus on specific writing skills, the idea of ‘one’ right way that needs to be taught, the study and practice of grammar). Therefore her approach seems to only partly reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the OAAA standards and OTC overall learning outcomes.

It seems that Beth does not understand her role in the curriculum. She declared that her approach is more student-centred; while in reality she implements more of a teacher-centred approach. Overall, her approach could be said to be based on CH, which does not match the OAAA standards, which are based on RE. (For more details see Appendix I: Beth interview transcript).

Beth being a western ELT teacher, it also can be said that importing staff from the West does not mean that education can be better or quality can improve, as the literature suggests and Beth is a good example of this. Beth’s testimony also supports the idea expressed in the literature that the transmitted approach still dominates (Wedell, 2003) and her approach suggests that she bases her teaching on meeting the immediate need of passing courses, rather than on what students might need beyond higher education (e.g., the focus on essay writing and the discrete skills required for this activity).

Component	Claim	Real practice
Curriculum aim	Developing academic and professional skills (RE)	Transmitting content (CH)
Knowledge	Academic and professional skills to be transmitted (RE)	Derived from academic discipline Didactic statements The ability to understand (CH)

Learning	Try to keep my classes very student centered, not so much coming out of my mouth (PR)	Teacher centered approach The desired result of learning is to change mind Providing standard task for all Learning is transmitted to change mind (CH)
Teacher	Teacher as facilitator (PR)	Teacher is the expert (CH)
Students	Independent, not spoon-fed. (PR)	Getting information (CH)
Assessment	Criterion based assessment, use of formative and summative assessment (RE)	Criterion based assessment, use of formative and summative assessment (RE)

Table 17 Beth’s thinking about ELT curriculum

It appears that this teacher has fallen into the trap of the recommended practice mentioned in most ELT documents, which emphasize the student centred approach.

Example 2: Amal

Amal is an ‘Arab’ English teacher. She has been working for three years at OTC. She has seven years of experience in teaching in higher education. Before that she worked as a teacher in the Ministry of Education in Oman and other Arab countries. She has an MA in Translation and a BA in English Language. At OTC, she is a lecturer and a coordinator in the Foundation Programme. She is also involved in teaching English for the Diploma programme.

Like Beth, Amal also stated that she only has a general idea of the OAAA standards, yet she was heavily involved in curriculum design. This indicates a disconnect in the curriculum.

When Amal was asked about her idea about how learning is taking place, she answered:

‘Independent learning that is a very key word that we are trying everywhere to develop’ (Amal)

This statement indicates that Amal supports a progressive approach, where students are the center of the learning process.

However, it is interesting to find that Amal's classroom practices were more aligned to classical humanism in that her approach was more teacher-centered. For example, describing her way of how she ensures that learning is taking place, Amal mentions that she used three approaches:

Approach One: 'Checking understanding'

'Am I a kind of person who goes in to the classroom and makes sure that for every point, for every step, Okay that they have understood that, then I can know what kind of learning is happening. So the continuous feedback that you get in the classroom and then after that of course we have the formal assessment, like whether it is test or whether it is assignment or that'.

'...every task it has instructions. What I say is, "Read the instructions, I will give you one minute to read the instructions" Okay they have read the instructions. Okay now turn down the paper, the book, whatever they have, the hand outs, "Don't look at it; look at me". "Don't read to me, I know how to read, tell me – tell me, explain to me what are you going to do?" This way I check – I am not checking their reading, I don't want them to read because if I say – for example, "Okay what do you want to do now? What are we supposed to do now in this task?" It's very easy for them to read, right? But they are not reading, I don't want now to test their reading; I want to test their understanding, whether they know what to do or not'.

Approach Two: "Do you know the meaning of this word?"

'My way is that, "Do you know the meaning of this word?" they will say, "Yes". "Okay put it in a sentence" I don't even ask the meaning, "Put it in a sentence" then they start thinking and when it comes to this part of the application, yesterday in one of my classes can you imagine ... the word "bad" – "bad" how simple is this word? "Good/bad" bad? And some students took ages to produce a sentence'

Approach Three: 'Asking questions, asking questions, asking questions'

'Another approach is that asking questions, asking questions, asking questions and let them come to you with the answer because sometimes the students – some students they cannot come – they cannot generate ideas. Some students they can but they cannot elaborate and they cannot develop the idea'

The three approaches indicate that Amal is very authoritative. Students are passive and lacking something. Her description of one of her sessions shows her mixed approach in the curriculum.

Amal episode

‘I was doing listening and listening was about the weather... For the listening I had the audio script... I designed the material there for listening is that to have a pre-listening activity in which they say, they discuss, they speak... and then they listen and they do the task...when they do the task it’s not so mechanic because I wouldn’t take “yes” or “no” or answer without referring or having them justify. And of course the kind of questions they were not very straightforward questions...’

‘And after that comes the part where we give a question which is more challenging or more than a question...for the students to talk about. So that listening, it was about extreme weather and ... how I developed the idea to make it more interesting and to expose them more to the language is that I prepared Power Point...There were pictures...connected to the weather, not in a way that this is a storm and this is snow; no. For example cold lemonade versus hot chocolate, so now drinks. So stimulating – stimulation of ideas... but now let’s associate it to clothes so I introduced the vocabulary of certain clothes that people wear in the weather. All that with pictures and then if they knew it, if they could provide the vocabulary, Okay that would be fine, otherwise I would give them the words. So now we are learning some vocabulary and we are making it fun. And they are also – they are stimulated to think out of the box’.

‘I knew from my experience that maybe there would be some students who didn’t know, so I took with me chestnuts to the classroom and then when the picture came on the Power Point they were looking, “Miss what’s this?” I said, “Oh this is this” then I brought it out from my pencil case, my pouch that I take to the classroom, “You see?” I looked round the class and they were looking, they were interested and some of them recognised, “Ah these, yeah I know, I ate it here, I ate it there, I see it” but many of them did not actually know what was that’.

Although Amal takes a teacher-centred approach, where she controls the lesson, she also demonstrates her desire to find ways of engaging students in thinking critically (e.g., stimulated to think out of the box). Her overall approach seems to be more reflective of reconstructionism (e.g., the student, managing/facilitating learning), yet she clearly still identifies as being very much in control (teacher as expert – classical humanism). She focuses on both the process and product of learning, which in some measure reflects a more progressivist approach (e.g., problem-solving activities such as when she taught about the weather), but the end product on which she focuses is fairly traditional (e.g., being able to write assignments for other modules – the process of writing, which reflects a classical humanist approach). Her sense of what an ideal student should be like

is based in moral terms (e.g., hard-worker, goes the extra mile even if no extra credit is involved), which seems to fit with a classical humanist approach, yet part of her view of assessment (looking at the progress within an individual student) is more progressivist. Amal's views reflect a spectrum of philosophies, some of which do, and some don't match directly with the OAAA standards. Table 18 shows Amal's thinking about ELT curriculum.

Component	Claim	Real practice
Curriculum aim	Developing academic and professional skills (RE)	Transmitting content (CH) Grammar and vocabulary
Knowledge	Content to be transmitted (CH)	Objective. Derived from academic discipline Didactic statements The ability to understand (CH)
Learning	Independent learning (PR)	Teacher centered approach The desired result of learning is to change mind Providing standard task for all Learning is transmitted to change mind (CH)
Teacher	Teacher as the expert (CH)	Teacher is the expert (CH)
Students	Developing independent learners (PR) Stimulated to think out of the box (PR-CH)	Passive (CH) Lacking knowledge (CH)
Assessment	Criterion based assessment, use of formative and summative assessment (RE)	Criterion based assessment, use of formative and summative assessment (RE)

Table 18 Amal's thinking about ELT curriculum

The emphasis on communicative language teaching identified as part of the new curriculum in Oman, outlined in the literature review, does not seem to be reflected in the reflections of either Beth or Amal. They highlight a focus on giving students the English language skills necessary to be able to complete their other courses in English, particularly in terms of being able to write essays. This does not seem to connect with

the OAAA desire to equip students with skills for the workplace (other than indirectly in terms of having passed certain courses; not in terms of being able to use English in the workplace).

As stated earlier, student centeredness is the focus of the curriculum in the degree programme. However, according to the interviews and documents analysis, this approach conflicted with other approaches when it comes to curriculum implementation. Because the student-centered approach is adopted from western education, various practices were mixed with this approach. The question rests on whether not enough explanation of the underlying principles of this approach in the document led to the conflict or even misunderstanding of the practices of this approach or whether this was an example of unawareness of stakeholders of the practices associated with this approach. The underlying principles were new to some teachers and curriculum developers, which may give rise to confusion over apparent practices underlying this approach. The stress over the use of this approach in the documents put teachers under pressure to use it even when they are really unaware of its underlying principles the mismatch between it and their educational beliefs.

There is evidence of confusion in the interviews, where one teacher was concerned about 'whether learners are implementing what she is teaching'. This is a risky statement where the teacher in doubt about her own teaching.

As well as the confusion in ELT curriculum found among individual teachers, the following comparison of two OTC documents is another example of the confusion.

AQAM vs. AWMD

'Learner centered approach' is a term relevant to the progressivism philosophy. The approach in this philosophy does not only promote learners learning how to learn but also negotiating what to learn (Clark, 1987). In the Academic Quality Assurance

Manual (AQAM), it was explained that a learner-centered approach is used because it is being encouraged in higher education and it is being supported by research evidence in education. According to the manual, the role of the instructors shifts from a giver of information to facilitating student learning. Blaming teacher-centered background in schools, it is emphasized that instructors should ensure that students develop the learning skills for further learning and create learning environments that motivate students to accept responsibility for learning.

However, there are some examples and descriptions given in the module descriptors, which do not align well with the learner-centered approach. Rather they represent other approaches, which promote rote learning and drill practices: the teacher has the authority and decides almost everything about the learning process; the learners' involvement is limited. In order to show how such approaches are used, examples will be taken from the AQAM and Academic Writing Module Descriptor (AWMD).

The first thing to be noted is that the handbook of module descriptors which was created in December 2012 is different from what was provided by the teacher responsible for Academic Writing module (September- February 2015-16).

AWMD is taught in the first year of the degree programme. The changes included module aims, learning outcomes, learning and teaching strategies, the organisation of content and assessment. This confirmed what teachers said about the continuous amendments and changes to ELT curriculum in the previous section.

Learning outcomes

College management provided details which describe learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment. In the AQAM, it is indicated that 'learning outcomes support a learner-centered approach to education. The emphasis is on the types of experiences that

students must have or must be provided to students so that they are able to achieve expected outcomes (AQAM).

Table 19 shows the learning outcomes of the degree programme described in the AQAM and the learning outcome of AWMD. The programme learning outcomes fall into three types: learner autonomy outcomes, knowledge and cognitive skills outcomes and transferable skills and competencies outcomes. Learner autonomy outcomes involve enabling learners to develop and demonstrate the ability to work independently across the four-year programme. Learners start with limited autonomy in the first two years, then increases towards the last two years. Knowledge and Cognitive Skills outcomes involve enabling learners to develop and demonstrate the ability to understand, comprehend and analyse knowledge; they are provided with detailed guidance in the first two years, then are required to use their own judgment and solve problems in the third year; in the fourth year, learners are taught the capacity to demonstrate diagnostic, analytical and creative skills without guidance in the fourth year. The transferable skills and competencies outcomes involve enabling learners to develop and demonstrate the ability to improve socially, academically and professionally. These skills includes self-management, effective communication both orally and in writing and demonstration of know how and judgment in the first two years with guidance. Then in the last two years students develop the ability to plan and manage independently, negotiate and demonstrate a high level of responsibility.

AQAM	AWMD
Learner Autonomy Knowledge and Cognitive Skills Transferable Skills and Competencies (Refer to Appendix)	Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate writing conventions; structure, grammar, syntax and referencing in relation to writing an academic essay of approximately 1500 words; Create arguments through logical steps using primary and secondary data. Analyse and interpret related information presented in various formats (texts, tables, graphs etc) in order to arrive at logical conclusions. Identify and select appropriate academic sources. Design a questionnaire based on prior reading in order

	<p>to collect relevant data.</p> <p>Appreciate the differences between questions that analyse, state, explain and discuss.</p> <p>Analyse information from a variety of secondary sources (with particular emphasis on paraphrasing, summarizing and referencing (and recombine the to support arguments.</p>
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Table 19 Learning outcomes in AQAM and AWMD

These three types of learning outcomes above reflect a mixture of the three philosophies: progressivism (learning autonomy, cognitive skills and transferable skills), classical humanism (knowledge and cognitive skills) and reconstructionism (transferable skills and competencies).

According to the AQAM, ‘the programme outcomes must be clearly achieved through the module on the programme’, which means that learning outcomes in modules have to reflect the overall learning outcomes of the degree programme. Looking at the AWMD, learning outcomes do not address the learner autonomy outcomes. As shown in table 19, it addresses the learning outcomes of knowledge, cognitive skills and academic competencies where learners demonstrate the ability to analyse, interpret, create argument and write a 1500 academic essay with appropriate structure, grammar, syntax and referencing. It appears that the AWMD does not address the learner autonomy and transferable learning outcomes indicated in the AQAM. The absence of learner autonomy and transferable skills outcomes in the module descriptor is an issue of concern, as will be shown in the next sections.

The following example is a lesson given to the students. It would have been more useful if there were lesson plans but the materials of ELT modules helped in analysis.

Example 1

Topic: Summing up the argument. Reading and writing conclusions (See Appendix H)

Activity one: Activity one was writing conclusions. The materials related to this activity involved:

1. Conclusion definition and purpose.
2. Information about how to write a strong conclusion
3. PowerPoint how to write a conclusion using conjunctions (Table 20).

4. Students were giving a task:
 - a. First read the following (two) essay plans (Only the introductory paragraph and ideas for the body paragraphs are given.)
 - b. Next write a concluding paragraph for each essay.

Slide 1: Conclusion (If + therefore/Since + then)	Slide 3: If + therefore If tourism creates jobs, therefore...	Slide 6: If + thereforetourism improves infrastructure	Slide 9: If + thereforetourism helps the economy
Slide 2: In summary, there are three positive impacts of tourism such as it creates jobs, it improves infrastructure and it helps the economy.	Slide 4: Since + then Since tourism creates jobs, then...	Slide 7: Since + then ...tourism improves the infrastructure	Slide 10: Since + then ...tourism helps the economy
	Slide 5: Because +so Because tourism creates jobs so ...	Slide 8: Because +sotourism improves the infrastructure	Slide 11: Because + sotourism helps the economy

Table 20 An example of ELT materials that indicate rote learning

This example shows that a mix of CH and RE approach is used. These power point slides in table 20 are about conjunctions that join phrases or sentences. It is clear that this hand-out tries to teach grammatical rule that students should remember when they write a conclusion.

Slides 1 and 2 consists of the title: Conclusion (If + therefore/Since + then) and a conclusion statement that student will use to practice the conjunctions provided in the session. The rest of the slides consists of phrases that students will use to practice the provided conjunctions. The sequence of knowledge provided in this PowerPoint represent a CH approach. It appears that the teacher is under pressure to use the student centered approach. However, it is obvious that there is imposition of the PR approach in the documents and no direction how to do that assuming that teachers know how to deal with such approach.

4.3.2.5 Teacher's role

The question here was: Think about a successful class you had and tell me what you did?

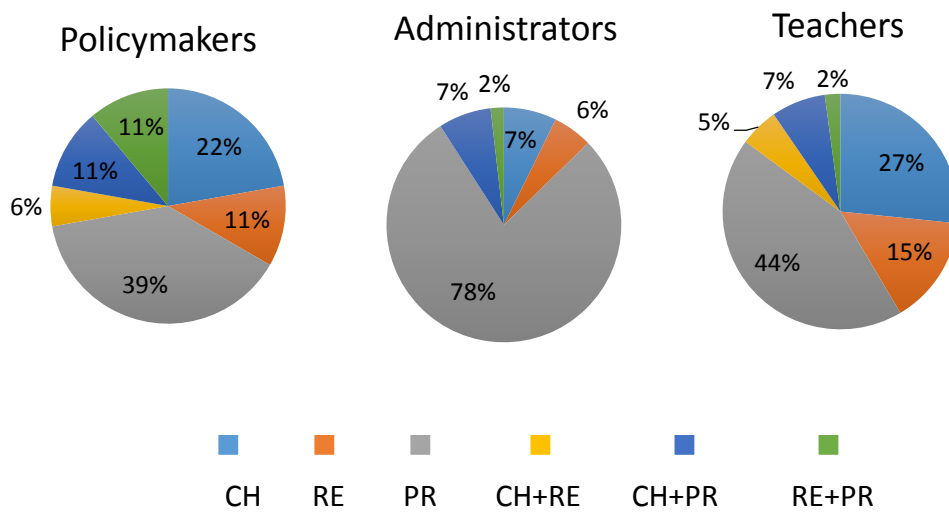


Figure 14 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the role of the teacher

Figure 14 shows the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the role of the teacher. As shown in the figure, the PR approach is favoured by stakeholders: policymakers (39%), administrators (78%) and ELT teachers (44%). However, in terms of individual thinking, figure 15 and 16 show that policymakers and ELT teachers have mixed views about the role of the teacher.

Figure 15 shows that OAAA documents view the role of the teacher from a mixture of the three philosophies. Unlike OAAA documents, Amanda view the role of the teacher from a only the CH and PR perspectives and there was no favour for the RE perspective.

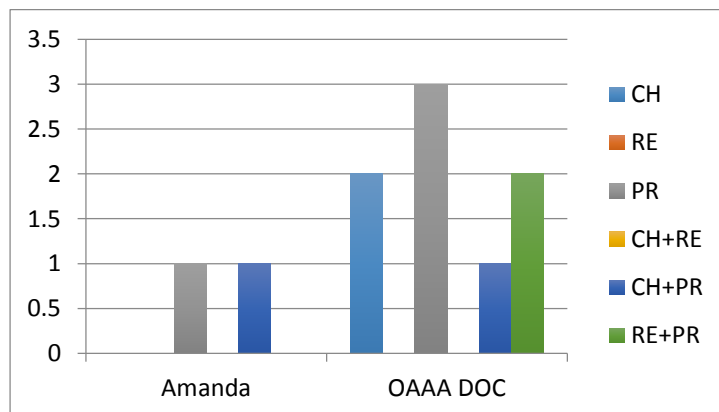


Figure 15 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the policymaker level about the role of the teacher

Concerning the ELT teachers' individual perspectives on the role of the teacher, figure 16 shows the conflicted perspectives. The findings show majority of teachers (Ahmed, Amal, Abdul and Gina) viewed the teacher's role from a PR perspective. On the other hand, some teachers (Beth and Zyad) viewed the role of the teacher from a CH perspective. Moreover, it is striking to find that majority of teachers (Amal, Abdul, Beth and Zyad) did not favour the RE perspective which was favoured by other teachers.

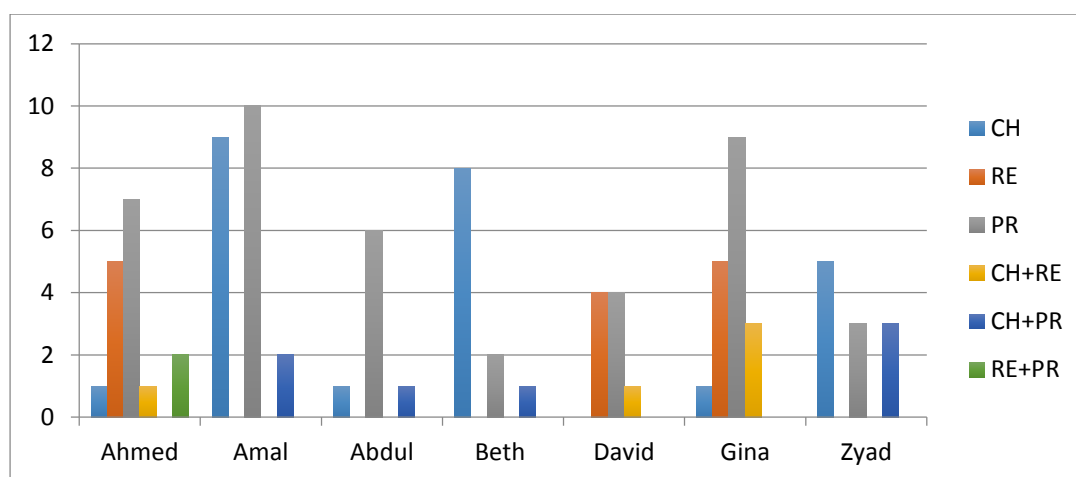


Figure 16 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the teacher level about the role of the teacher

In terms of the role of the teacher, stakeholders used different references to conceptualise the role of the teacher. For example:

The PR statements included the role of the teachers as:

- The creator of an environment where students learn how to learn (Clark, 1987: 49)
 - ‘The emphasis is on the types of experiences that students must have or must be provided to students’
 - ‘... teaching to ensure students are able to develop as learners’
- The decision maker (Clark, 1987: 52)
 - ‘This requires teaching staff to design appropriate assessment tasks’
 - ‘Contribute effectively to collaborative decision making at institutional and departmental level as part of committees and working groups to ensure effective flow of information and decision making’

- The responder to learner needs and encourager of learner responsibility (Clark, 1987: 95)

‘I would expect a teacher to know all the students and know about the individual students’ needs’

‘To shape developed and well-rounded individuals whose potential is enhanced to the fullest’

‘Teaching Teams must support and advise students to take responsibility for their own learning by using all the available learning opportunities to the utmost, and approaching the relevant sources for help’

- The facilitator (Clark, 1987: 50)

‘To facilitate learners’

‘The lecturer or instructor as a facilitator and innovator of the learning process’

There is also a character of a CH approach where the teacher is seen as:

‘Possess sufficient breadth or depth of specialist knowledge in the discipline to work within established teaching programmes’

There are some statements that include both CH and PR perspectives where teacher is seen as a promoter of cognitive skills such as analysing and creative thinking:

‘Enables students... to develop their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking’

‘To stimulate an enquiring, analytical and creative approach to study’

There are also some statements that view the role of the teacher from a CH approach where the role of the teacher is seen as instructor, explainer, and transmitter of knowledge predetermined in advance.

‘Referring to language, for instance, you could say that... so the rules of grammar, for instance, or something, you need to make them aware of some of these rules’

‘... China is an ancient country. And the second sentence, it culturally goes back 7,000 years. Well, that’s a very clear nicely sentence that what’s the word “ancient” mean? 7,000 years means old. However, when you have a sentence saying, you know, China lacks strict hierarchical structure and they don’t know the word “lack” and they don’t know the word “strict” and don’t know “hierarchy” and they don’t know “structure” what can you do with that? You can’t teach any type of independent learning skills, it’s basically, you know, the

shortest way to do that is what Arabic student in the class, that's what this word means. And it becomes just literal translation'

And an RE approach where the role of the teacher is seen as the model native speaker who help students to master 'situationally appropriate language, leading to accurate, appropriate and fluent use of language ' in the workplace (Clark, 1987:95).

'...provides students with the opportunity to further develop their skills needed ... in later working life'

'All four language skills, listening, reading, writing and speaking will be further strengthened in accordance with the requirements of the work place'

Overall, the findings about the role of the teacher, like the learning component, seem to confirm the literature in terms of the adoption of 'learner-centered approach' where the teacher is seen as a facilitator. However, as reflected in the learning component (Section 4.3.2.4) there is misunderstandings and misinterpretations in the practices of this approach, which had led to confusion.

4.3.2.6 Student's role

The question was: Describe a typical good class you remember and tell me what students did in your class?

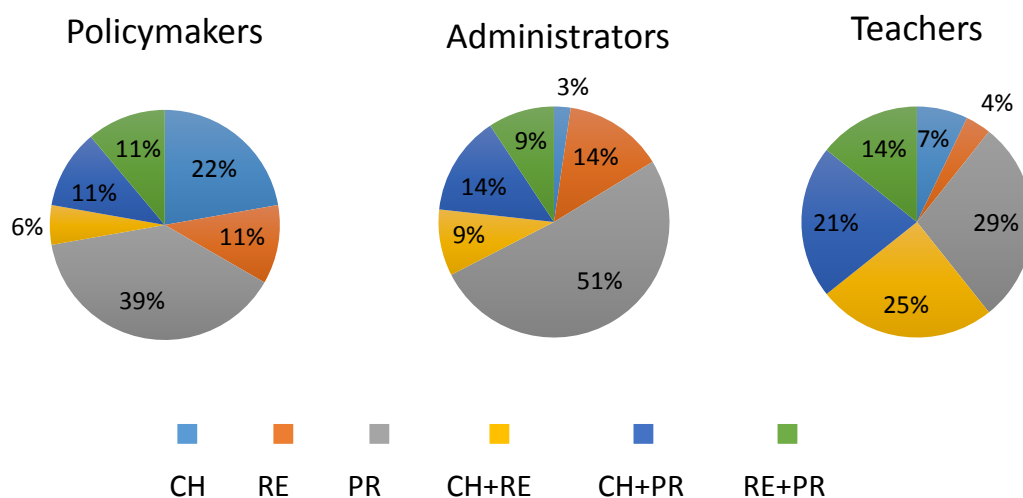


Figure 17 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the role of the student

Figure 17 the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the role of the student. As indicated in the figure, the PR philosophy appears to be favoured more than other perspectives by all stakeholders: policymakers (39%), management (51%) and teachers (29%).

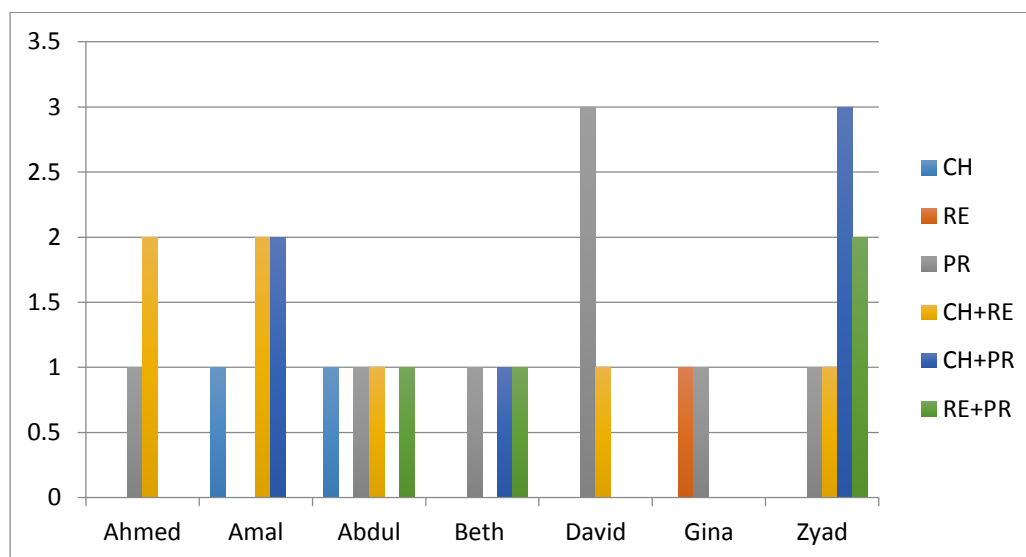


Figure 18 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the teacher level about the role of the student

Concerning the ELT teachers' individual perspectives on the role of the student, figure 18 shows the conflicted perspectives. The figure shows that some teachers (Ahmed, Amal, and Zyad) viewed the student's role from CH and RE perspectives. On the other hand, other teachers (David) viewed the role of the teacher from a PR perspective.

Regarding the role of students, OTC documents stated that the curriculum 'promote(s) a student-centered approach to teaching and learning which recognises that active student engagement is necessary for effective learning' and 'to shape developed and well-rounded individuals whose potential is enhanced to the fullest (AQAM). This view clearly demonstrates that a PR philosophy is favoured. The curriculum also emphasizes elements of a PR philosophy in that students are expected 'be able to take responsibility for managing their own learning' (NQF) as well as 'to respond to requests for providing feedback on teaching, modules and programmes with the necessary diligence' (AQAM).

From the analysis of the interviews, there were some references that included both CH and PR perspectives in terms of the role of student:

‘They are stimulated to think out of the box’ (Amal – ELT teacher)

‘We are now trying to inculcate in all the students is creative thinking; it’s not what people say, what about you? You should develop a certain argument’ (Amal – ELT teacher)

These two statements indicate that students are encouraged to reason (CH) and engage their minds (PR).

Furthermore, there were some references that included both CH and RE perspectives in terms of the role of student:

‘Because even some students they don’t know the basic things about referencing. So that’s what I was doing there’ (Ahmed – ELT teacher)

‘I think it’s pretty easy to determine that most students aren’t ready to perform on an academic level’ (John – administrator)

This indicates students are lacking something of worth and in order to pass to the next level of their studies, they need to have these specific skills. This means that teachers are concerned about students as they have to be (CH and RE perspectives) instead of focusing on students as they are (PR perspective).

It was interesting to find that some teachers classify students in terms of ability: teachers prefer students ‘to be roughly homogeneous in achievement and in learning speed’ (Clark, 1987: 7). If these students are pre occupied with certain learning experiences, ‘the whole class is expected to move through...(the course work) at the same pace’ (Ibid). Their statements included:

‘Teachers remember either the good students or the weaker students and those who are average are usually like forgotten easily’ (Zyad).

‘I have identified the good ones in terms of being responsible and in terms of academic skills’ (David).

This means that, these teachers viewed ‘the slower learner... as one lacking in ability, as is the learner whose past history is deficient in comparison to others in the class’ (Clark, 1987: 12). This represents a CH approach. Bloom (1971:47) has called this kind of fixed unalterable level of ability as ‘a pernicious self-fulfilling prophecy’:

‘The instructor expects a third of his class to learn well what is taught, a third to learn less well, and a third to fail or just get by. These expectations are transmitted to the students through school grading policies and practices and through the methods and materials of instruction. Students quickly learn to act in accordance with them, and the final sorting out through the grading process approximates the teacher’s original expectations. A pernicious self-fulfilling prophecy has been created’.

This indicates that the practices of ‘student centered approach’ were not implemented as the documents suggested.

In their statements about the role of students, some teachers pointed out that some students were lacking ‘responsibility’ and describing them as not being ‘independent’.

‘The thing is when students come from foundation. They are still not as independent as they should be’ (Abdul)

It was mentioned in OTC documents that assessment should test that students are able to exercise ‘personal responsibility’ (AQAM). This means that the teacher should promote this in the classroom and not expect students to be preoccupied with this skill.

Moreover, according to AQAM, the teaching, learning and assessment strategies should enable the learner to develop and demonstrate the following learning outcomes:

Type of outcome	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Learner Autonomy	Limited autonomy; able to undertake directed tasks;	The ability to undertake directed and some amount of self-directed activity;	Increased autonomy in that the learner does not require close guidance; The learner often takes	The learner exercises self-management in a range of contexts and is independent with reference to

			responsibility for the work of others and/or for allocation of resources	the use of primary and secondary sources of information;
--	--	--	--	--

Table 22 Learner autonomy as described in the four levels of the degree programme

As shown in table 22, the document describes the learning outcomes in the four levels of the degree programme in terms of learner autonomy. As explained in the previous chapter the four ELT modules in the tourism and hospitality degree programme were taught in the first two levels: level 1 and level 2. As far as the ELT curriculum is concerned, learner autonomy is limited in the first two levels where the four ELT modules are taught. The learner is able to undertake directed tasks in level 1 and undertakes directed and some amount of self-directed activity in level two.

From the analysis of the interviews, it appeared that participants did not look at the learning outcomes. They focused on how to give the students the content and skills needed to pass the course, unaware that transferable skills as mentioned in the documents also need to be part of their role, instead of expecting students to come with these skills prepared. That is why they were complaining about the lack of autonomous learners in the programme. Although it can be argued that these learning outcomes can be considered as too general and too vague for the ELT curriculum. Moreover, the documents do not seem to explain to the ELT teachers how to approach these learning outcomes.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion about the learning component, the documents pointed out that students are used to a teacher-centered approach, and higher education requires a student-centered approach, which applied in the affiliated external HEI. Furthermore, teachers were given a note in the ELT module descriptors that ‘A variety of teaching approaches will be followed in classroom instruction, including student-centered communicative learning, task-based activities, discussions, pair work and group

work, individual and group research to develop independent learning and study skills'. This means that students are not yet prepared for such an approach. For students to be successful in a learner-centered environment, they need to learn new skills. These skills include learning how to learn independently, which allows them to ask questions and research and work with others. It is not expected that students would know how to do these skills on their own. Therefore, the teacher is expected to facilitate an atmosphere where students use these new skills.

4.3.2.7 Assessment

The question was: What do you think of the assessment procedures in the ELT courses?

In your opinion, how should examinations be?

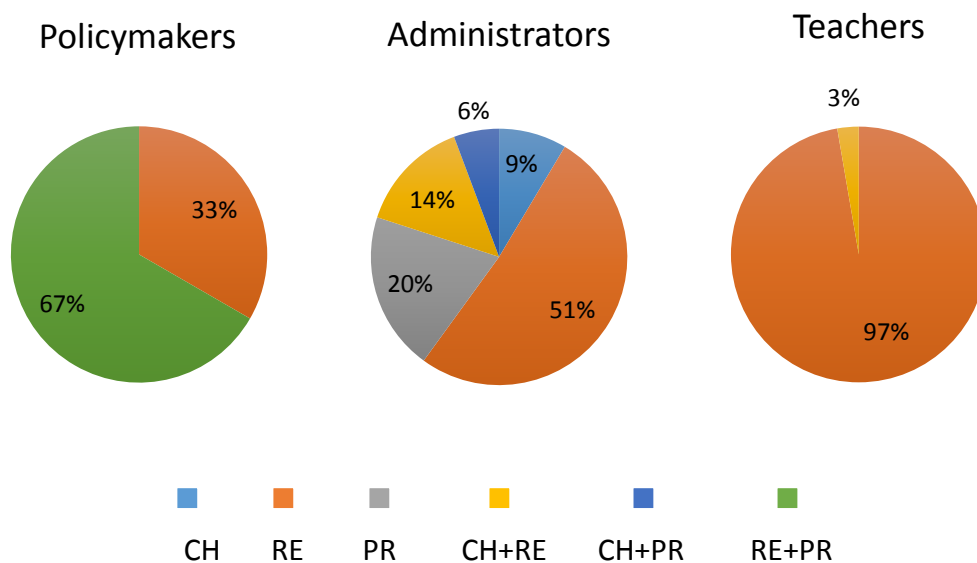


Figure 19 The distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning the assessment

Figure 19 illustrates the distribution of perspectives of stakeholders concerning assessment. The figure shows that policy makers favoured a mixture of RE and PR philosophies more than other perspectives. On the other hand, the RE perspective was the most dominant perspective among administrators (51%) and teachers (97%).

Interestingly, while assessment was viewed from a CH perspective among management and teachers, none of the policymakers favored this approach.

The PR statements included:

‘Student centered teaching uses assessment as a part of the learning process. The processes and purposes of assessment thus shifts from merely assigning grades to providing constructive feedback designed to assist with improvement’.

‘The student has a further responsibility to respond to requests for providing feedback on teaching, modules and programmes with the necessary diligence’

‘Exercises personal responsibility’

There seem to be some contradictions between the assessment type and the assessment aim. The following statements show that policymakers appear to view the assessment type from an RE approach which a criterion-referenced approach:

‘All student work is graded using a 6 point grading system from A (excellent) to F (Fail)’

‘Assessments for each module will have both formative and summative aspects’

There are also some statements that take a CH approach as the assessment shows ‘clear and strong understanding of subject matter/concepts/issues’ and ‘shows evidence of wider reading’.

There seem to be some confusion about policymakers view of assessment as in the one hand, they say that the purpose of assessment ‘shifts from merely assigning grades to providing constructive feedback’ (PR), while in a different statement they say ‘all student work is graded...from A (excellent) to F (Fail) and ‘The minimum pass mark ... of student assessment shall normally be 40% of the maximum marks’ (RE).

However, there are some statements, which emphasize the phrase ‘the assessment should support student centered’. According to PR philosophy, assessment should assist learners to reflect upon their own learning and process and their products. So, this shows

some vague and confusing way of how to assess the students. This seems to raise some questions about the policymakers vagueness about the assessment.

Another interesting thing about policy makers views of assessment that Amanda say she ‘I would personally prefer...’ and ‘I believe...’ which shows that she prefers Amanda’ view of assessment

‘I don’t know them specifically how they go about assessment in language programs’

According to Amanda standards are there to It is believed that standards are made to make sure the programmes in any HEIs follow ‘they implement the appropriate policies and support and approaches to make sure that they meet the standard, and that’s why standards are important’

Although the number of references appears to have mostly an RE perspective, Figure 20 shows that there are various perspectives within individuals at the level of management.

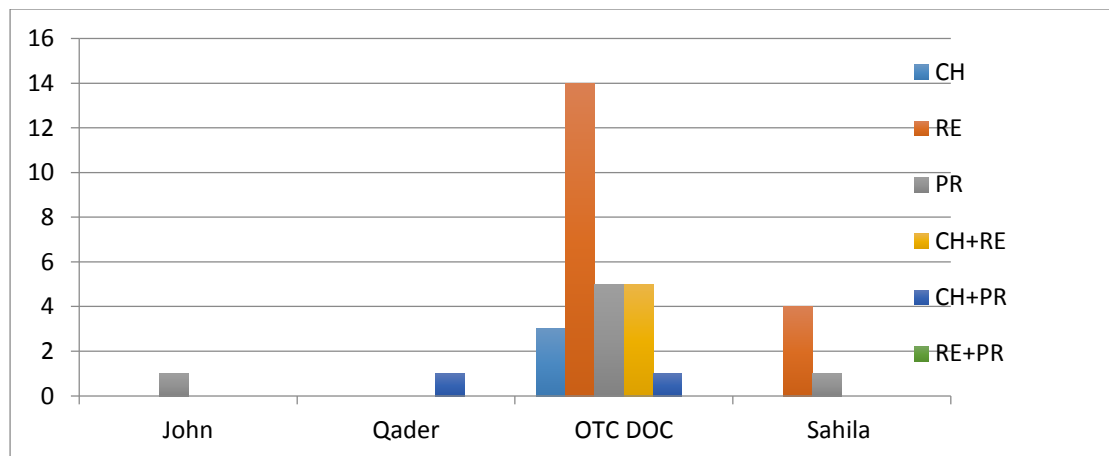


Figure 20 The distribution of perspectives of individuals at the management level concerning the assessment

The figure illustrates that OTC documents, have more references which indicate a RE perspective. Conversely, it is shown that John and Qader did not view the assessment from the same perspective. While John view the assessment from a PR perspective, it can be seen that Qader view it from a mixture of CH and PR perspectives. Interestingly, Sahila, who was part in designing and planning OTC documents, did not view the assessment from a CH perspective. As it is shown in the figure, OTC documents had a mixture of all perspectives concerning the assessment.

Other issues mentioned about assessment is that OTC follows the external HEI regulations, which is evident of the western influence.

In all decisions relating to assessments, grading, progression and classification of awards for the BSc (Hons) in Tourism and Hospitality, the College will follow the General Assessment Regulations of Dublin Institute of Technology (AQAM)

There is also another statement which shows that some policymakers have no idea how students are being assessed in the language programme:

‘I don’t know them specifically how they go about assessment in language programs’ (Amanda)

According to curriculum the HEIs has to create affective assessment tools. THMP handbook has fixed criteria. Most of participants and documents agree that learners are tested against fixed criteria. This reflect s an RE approach.

There is mixed up statements in the document that cause confusion.

There are also some statements which indicate a CH approach in which that the content of assessment should include items involved in the use of general intellectual capacities, such as:

‘Clear and strong understanding of subject matter/concepts/issues’ and ‘shows evidence of wider reading’.

Overall, the restriction of assessment in the document seems to contradict with the components of learning, the role of the teacher and the role of the student. Earlier in this chapter (Sections 4.3.2.4, 4.3.2.45 and 4.3.2.46), it was found that the PR is favored by all stakeholders in these three components. The issue of concern is that if assessment has a fixed criterion and students are graded based on their formative and summative assessment, then learning and teaching are unlikely to follow the PR approach. Based on the PR approach, the purpose of assessment is to assist learners to reflect upon their own learning process and their products, and to learn to promote a capacity for self-evaluation. The assessment in this approach is negotiated assignments in the form of

process activities which have an end product. The absence of this mode of assessment may restrict the teacher from being a responder to learners' needs and also restricts learners from being involved in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of their own meanings. It can be implied that there was not enough thinking of how to integrate curriculum components. Moreover, as discussed in the previous sections of curriculum components, there is a lack of communication among stakeholders, which has resulted in tensions and confusion.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and the discussion of the research. The study found that there are tensions and muddles on the ground, as various interpretations of curriculum are brought to bear by different stakeholders. The findings showed that there are contradictions in the stakeholders' way of thinking about the purpose and practice of the English language curriculum. More interestingly and importantly, the tensions are evident not only among the groups of stakeholders but also within individuals, based on their educational beliefs and backgrounds. The next chapter summarise and integrate the main findings and implications of the overall study.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes and integrates the main findings and implications of the overall study. The study examines the purpose and practice of higher education from the perspective of education providers in the field of higher education. Specifically, this research examines the tensions and confusion among academics, administrators and policy makers and how they view the English language curriculum. This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings and implications of this research. It goes on to affirm the contribution of this research to a further understanding of the English language curriculum in higher education in general and Oman in particular. In addition, it makes some recommendations and provides the study limitations.

5.2 A summary of the main findings and implications

The main research question for this study, as given in Chapter two, was:

What are the potential tensions among stakeholders in the Omani higher education?

In order to answer the main research question, the study has examined the following specific subsidiary research questions:

1. How do policymakers view the purpose and practice of higher education?
2. How do administrators view the purpose and practice of higher education?
3. How do ELT teachers view the purpose and practice of higher education?

In addressing these questions, this research has presented findings from data analysis (See the previous chapter). The analysis of the ELT programme in the Tourism and Hospitality Management Programme (THMP) at Oman Tourism College (OTC) reveals what the literature review in chapter two suggested in terms of potential tensions in higher education. The findings show that there are tensions and muddles on the ground.

These tensions are among stakeholders and within individuals in the groups. A number of issues related to the ELT curriculum have been discussed in the previous chapter.

This section integrates the main findings.

The findings revealed the ELT curriculum planning process and the role of OAAA standards. It also revealed the role of people who were involved in the planning process. The ELT curriculum committee approached the curriculum planning in a linear style where the objectives and aims were treated as the main focus. The superficial way of planning the curriculum, the linear objectives-approach and the ‘too general’ standards had led to distorted interpretations of curriculum resulting from differences among the various stakeholders involved in ELT curriculum. It was also striking that people who were involved in the curriculum planning contradicted the documents they designed.

The present ELT curriculum at OTC is informed by broad, western influenced standards. The interview with the policymakers who were involved in making these standards and making visits to assess programmes in Omani HEIs against these standards, including ELT programmes, showed that there was lack of awareness of what the ELT curriculum practices involve in terms of aims, knowledge prescribed, learning, the role of teacher, the role of students and assessment. There is a need for a robust regulation of English language standards and provision that encompasses the larger purpose of education in Oman. If HEIs were to respond effectively to such regulation, informed responses to issues and challenges would be considered and produced. In addition, adequate provisions need to be designed locally to address English language proficiency and how it relates to Omani students for whom English is not a first language.

This study identifies the key issues that need to be discussed among stakeholders, including policymakers, HEI management including curriculum developers and teachers,

regarding the larger purpose of education and how it serves the Omani learners. As has been highlighted in this research, the present ELT curriculum conforms to OAAA standards, which are not mainly based on the Omani context. Western standards are adopted and expatriate educators are consulted. This means that new philosophical perspectives are being introduced to the Omani educational context. Thus, this study implies that stakeholders need to have a clear discussion of the underlying philosophies of all curriculum components including clarifying views on the nature of curriculum aims, knowledge prescribed, learning, the role of the teacher, the role of the students and assessment. These components need a careful integration with the larger purpose of education.

This research takes as given that the ELT curriculum is part of a broader purpose of education. Every component of the curriculum is essential and contributes to achieving the curriculum goals. Overlooking one component could result in not achieving the curriculum goals. The analysis of present ELT curriculum components illustrates the stakeholders' misinterpretation, misunderstanding, conflicted thinking and misuse of the larger purpose of Omani education. There is a need to revisit the larger purpose of education along with every component of the curriculum as a whole picture. There is also a need to re-examine the process of ELT curriculum planning in the degree programmes.

Issues such as ELT curriculum planning and the role of national standards in curriculum have been highlighted. The analysis, in this research, of the English language curriculum in the degree programme at OTC has found that the OAAA documents (ISAM and NQF), the external affiliated HEI and the industry are the major sources used in the development and planning of the ELT curriculum. Furthermore, the three current issues

of Omani higher education: 'magistracy of influence', the market led-view and western influences, have influenced the content, teaching and learning of ELT.

This study highlights the fact that involving experts in the Omani education system does not mean that quality of education improves. It also highlights the fact that western influences do not seem to play a great role in the higher education system as teachers, management and curriculum developers seem to be not aware of their underlying philosophies and practices.

The present Omani government endorses the strong economic rationale of education. It is thus a challenge to educators at different levels. The findings of this research indicate the prevalence of reconstructionist view of education. This means that social needs are stressed over other views. The pressure on producing a highly skilled workforce does not, however, dictate the overall purpose of education mentioned by Oman 2020. It emphasizes the development of skills and ignores the development of individuals. This finding supports Donn & Al Manthri (2010) and Badry & Willoughby (2015) who point out that human interests as a vision of education have been 'eclipsed' or given small time allocation. From the analysis, the ELT curriculum does not seem to serve this view of education. As well as social needs to be met, the Omani young generation should be empowered to engage with their real life and society. Thus, this research implies that there should be greater thinking. Moreover, the contradictory views, almost in all curriculum components, among stakeholders, about the purpose of education suggest that either they conform to what is dictated to them and emphasize the economic - social view or that they follow their own beliefs and views about education. Therefore, an open discussion among all stakeholders should be promoted in order to show the relevance of education to learners.

The findings also suggest that there are overlapping perspectives in the way stakeholders think about the ELT curriculum. The adoption of western practices, which reflects the PR approach in terms of learning, the role of student and the role of teacher has been emphasized in the recent reforms in higher education. School mission, curriculum aim, knowledge and assessment also represent the country's focus on the economy and on developing skills, all of which represent an RE approach.

The findings suggest that the ELT curriculum lacks explicit underlying philosophies and it has been argued here that the omission of explicit curriculum philosophies can lead to possible misunderstanding. Teaching and learning approaches mentioned in the ELT curriculum, which claimed to be supported by research, need to be further clarified and connected to the purpose of education. It appears that people who were involved in the curriculum design process have not been aware that different beliefs, interpretation and views can distort the stated goals of curriculum. As White (1998) states, problems of communication and interpretation at the implementation stage affect the curriculum.

The research findings reveal that the controversial issues lie at the teachers' level. ELT teachers interpreted the ELT curriculum differently. It appears that no time or effort has been given to training the teachers. This had led to confusion around lack of awareness of underlying concepts of ELT curriculum.

In chapter three, part of the discussion centered on the Omani curriculum at school and tertiary levels. Most of the findings in the literature reveal that English programmes in Oman lack training in skills that students need for their future (Al Mahrooqi, 2012a; Siddiqui, 2014). Most of the relevant literature is also critical of teaching methodologies and the content of these programmes. This is also true of the current ELT curriculum at OTC, as the findings of this research indicate. However, previous research has not indicated the difficulties in ELT practice related to the planning of the curriculum. The

present study illustrates and discusses the issue in detail and strongly argues that the problems of the ELT curriculum are related to the design of the curriculum components and their connection to the overall purpose of education. The problems are rooted in the lack of explicit philosophy and lack of consensus over meanings underlying the concepts in the curriculum.

This research suggests that there should be a serious discussion relating to concepts and approaches used in the ELT curriculum. For example, the term ‘critical thinking’ lacks clear definition. Stakeholders do not seem to understand its meaning. Another example of misunderstanding is in the suggested approach to teaching and learning in the present ELT curriculum, which is a ‘student-centered’ approach. Most teachers claimed to know about this approach. The interpretation of this approach varied but most of ELT teachers linked the student-centered approach to teacher-centeredness, where teacher has the authority in the classroom. This means that there is an urgent need to explain these concepts and approaches in order to have a clear picture of practices in the classroom. As can be seen clearly in the finding of this research, learning and teaching is greatly influenced by western education. It is not surprising to find western approaches in the Omani curriculum. The literature explains this influence as being a way to improve quality of education. However, a wrong interpretation of these approaches seems to be powerful. The interpretations of some stakeholders, of a student-centered approach indicate what actually appears to be a traditional way of thinking. Moreover, the findings seem to suggest that there are some constraints that limit the implementation of a student-centered approach in Oman. These constraints reflect either stakeholders’ lack of awareness of this approach, their understanding of its underlying meaning and practices or administrative constraints that need further consideration. These constraints include lack of student’s motivation, low English proficiency, misinterpretation of

student-centered approaches, teacher training, programme restriction and the issue of assessment.

Furthermore, the beliefs and practices at the teacher level about teaching and learning is evidence of teachers' misunderstanding and misinterpretation of terms and concepts used in the documents. Thus, adopting western approaches with wrong practices and interpretation is likely to prevent achieving the overall purpose of education. This research implies that borrowing western approaches needs a thorough negotiation of underlying thinking. Therefore, the western terminologies used in the ELT curriculum by different stakeholders need urgent attention. There should be an awareness of these terms and concepts used.

The impact of globalisation, western influences and a market-led view of education has influenced education, not only in Oman, but also in neighbouring countries. The research findings indicate that although progressivism and reconstructivism approaches are stressed in the ELT curriculum, evidence from the analysis of the knowledge prescribed, and from teaching and learning practices shows that a classical humanist approach guides the current practices. It means that the view of education is to transmit knowledge. These findings support findings from literature. Wedell (2000), for example, pointed out that the new changes in the Arab countries' education support the students centered approach but that the traditional practices are still common.

5.3 Contribution to Theory and Practice

The significance of the study can be seen in the original contribution of this research in three areas of knowledge including theoretical knowledge, content knowledge and methodological knowledge.

In respect to theoretical knowledge, the theoretical contributions include the following aspects. First, this research extends an understanding of the concept of

internationalisation of higher education that has been applied to explore the recent reforms in the field of higher education and how these reforms are affecting the provision of higher education in general and the English language curricula in particular. Accordingly, this research contributes to theoretical knowledge in terms of the understanding of the related issues of the internationalisation of higher education and the reflection on the muddles and tensions in the recent reforms in Oman and around the world. More specifically, in the process of exploring the rationales of internationalisation of higher education in the Omani context, the researcher addressed, through the related literature in internationalisation of higher education, the recent reforms in the field. This has allowed seeing the overall purpose of higher education, through presenting academic, political, economic and social/cultural rationales. Moreover, the exploration of the application of the internationalisation of higher education in the Omani context has shown the stakeholders' way of thinking about the recent reforms, which has resulted in many tensions and conflicts.

In terms of content knowledge, the contribution is significant. The focus of this thesis was exploring tensions and confusion among stakeholders in Omani higher education. Through the analysis, the thesis has explored the perspectives of stakeholders about the ELT curriculum in terms of school mission, curriculum aim, knowledge, learning, the role of teacher, the role of student and assessment. It has also explored the process of curriculum planning of the ELT curriculum in the degree programme and related documents. Stakeholders interested in this study will include policymakers, HEIs' administrators, curriculum developers, teachers and educators and scholars interested in the ELT curriculum in Oman and else where in the world.

The investigation of how the English language curriculum is put into practice in an Omani tertiary context provides important implications for future research. This

research can inform the area of second language learning and teaching in the field of applied linguistics by helping to increase the body of knowledge that is available in terms of curriculum planning. Teaching English to undergraduate tourism and hospitality management students seems have never to have been explored in the Omani context. Thus, this study is a contribution to the field in the region. It is hoped to bridge the gap in the curriculum planning of ELT and keep the field current with developments in order to raise the quality of teaching and learning in Oman. It also helps to increase research-based knowledge in the area of ELT curriculum studies.

To the best of my knowledge, this study is the only empirical study about stakeholders' thinking about ELT in Oman. Previous Omani studies have indicated that the quality of education in Oman seems to be still inadequate despite the reforms made in the educational system in the past years (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al Shmeli, 2009; Gonzalez, 2008; Romano & Seeger, 2014). These studies stress that students do not have the required skills to meet the current demands of the country and one of the major skills areas in which these graduates have been reported to be lacking is the English language. This research confirms the previous literature by highlighting the confusion. The effect of these issues has influenced the components of the curriculum in terms of school mission, curriculum aim, knowledge, learning, the role of teacher, the role of student and assessment. Contradictory views have been highlighted that will make stakeholders understand their thinking about curriculum.

In respect to methodological knowledge, there has been a major contribution in terms of the analytical framework and methodological procedures.

First, this research presents an overall picture of stakeholders' thinking of ELT curriculum in terms of curriculum aims, knowledge prescribed, learning, the role of the teacher, the role of the student and assessment. The analysis framework of this study

stimulates stakeholders to better understand their own beliefs about ELT curriculum. It also provides them with an understanding of other ways of thinking about the provision of higher education. The need for stakeholders to put the ELT curriculum into an overall picture can assist them to understand the underlying assumptions and effectively guide future curriculum planning.

This research provides a framework for an analysis of the ELT curriculum and the main currents of thought influencing it. This framework demonstrates a way of analysing and questioning stakeholders' thoughts about the ELT curriculum including policymakers, HEIs' administrators and teachers and curriculum developers. In addition, the analysis of curriculum aims, knowledge, teaching and learning and assessment provides a basis for further development of curriculum documents such as official agendas, policies, curriculum descriptors, manuals and training programmes, based on determined curriculum philosophies. The conceptual framework used in this research has helped to clarify tensions and contradictory views among stakeholders regarding the ELT curriculum. This study is only analytical and describes the real curriculum in an Omani HEI, providing examples of stakeholders' thinking and confusion concerning the ELT curriculum in terms of aims, knowledge, learning, the role of teacher, the role of student and assessment. It is hoped that stakeholders recognize the larger philosophical differences that their conflicts reflect. This research does not attempt to provide answers to questions about what HEIs should teach or how the curriculum should be organized. This study provides some recommendations for rethinking the higher education/ELT curriculum:

First, curriculum should implement an overall rationale rather than allowing development to happen in a piecemeal manner. As stated by Kelly (2009), '...some of the inadequacies of previous attempts at curriculum planning can be attributed to the fact

that it has tended to proceed in a rather piecemeal way within subjects rather than according to any overall rationale'. Thus, taking philosophies as a basis for curriculum planning and integrating curriculum components serve the larger purpose of the curriculum and higher education.

Second, in order to integrate these components there should be discussion and reflection. This means that stakeholders should communicate, discuss and reflect so that the overall purpose of higher education can be achieved. This research argues that open interactive discussions about the curriculum among stakeholders are crucial. The research suggests that ELT should be contextualized. The present curriculum is influenced by mainly western views. The standards and curriculum practices are derived from western ideas and approaches. In addition, the stakeholders hold mixed beliefs about the curriculum combining or confusing western views and traditional practice. The research suggests that a discussion about ELT curriculum thinking must be a priority during the planning of the curriculum. This will ensure a coherent curriculum.

Third, teachers require professional development training. Training will help to them to identify what is expected from them, their roles and students' roles.

5.4 Study Limitations

Acknowledging the limitations of research is one aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Cohen et al, 2007:116). The limitation for the current research relates to the sample. First, this research was limited to one HEI as a sample to examine the tensions and confusions in higher education in Oman. However, the aim of qualitative research is to examine a small sample to allow a greater depth (Patton, 2002: 244). Second, this study included the perspectives of policymakers, administrators and ELT teachers but it did not include any participants from the HEI's students. The inclusion of students' perceptions and how they interpret the provision of higher education could potentially

allow seeing the tensions from a different side. Consequently the findings are not generalisable based on the data presented in this study. Therefore, based on these limitations, more implications for further research arise. A further research uses the perspectives of students could contribute to a better understanding of the provision and issues of higher education.

Moreover, due to time constraint, this study is limited to one programme, which is the ELT curriculum in the degree of Tourism and Hospitality Programme (THMP) at OTC. So this study is limited to the reflection of an in-depth knowledge of an academic programme in an undergraduate level. Therefore, this limitation could be seen as an opportunity for further research.

Furthermore, it would be very useful to supplement the present work, consisting of interviews and document analysis, by classroom observation. In this way, the evident tensions and confusions among stakeholders, and their views on the ELT curriculum, might be brought into sharper, perhaps even different focus, by the evidence of teachers' actual teaching and learning practices. Unfortunately, with a limited time available for analysing the obtained data for this research, the researcher could not include this method in the current study and can only suggest this as the subject of a future research project.

Regarding the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA), one of the greatest challenges was scheduling interviews with policymakers (See section 3.4). Being persistent through Email allowed for interviewing one participant only. If there were more data from policymakers, it would have been interesting to compare different perspectives about the provision of higher education at this level of organisation.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the presentation of findings and the discussions using a mixture of interviews and document analysis, confirms that the main research question was answered. This study has highlighted tensions and confusion among stakeholders about the provision and practice of higher education in Oman. Through the analysis, the thesis has explored stakeholders' thinking about the ELT curriculum in terms of school mission, curriculum aim, knowledge, learning, the role of teacher, the role of student and assessment. It has also explored the process of curriculum planning of the ELT curriculum in the degree programme and related documents. Such discussion has highlighted decisions made by people who were involved and challenges faced in the planning process. Such challenges have affected the implementation of the curriculum. The implications of the research for ELT curriculum thinking are significant. This study indicates that there is a need to rethink decisions made in the field of higher education. There is also a need for reflection in philosophical influences on every component of the ELT curriculum in order to achieve the overall purpose of education. Reflection upon this issue means a more coherent curriculum, which would be beneficial for teachers, students and the Omani society.

In the age of globalisation and technology, Omani higher education must ensure that the young generation can benefit from the influences around them. Therefore, promoting learners' local context and environment in the higher education curriculum needs to be considered. In addition, there should be an open dialogue among stakeholders in planning the curriculum.

Appendices

Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Questions for Various Participants

Purpose of question	Number of interview question	Teachers	Curriculum designers, head of language department and college principals	OAAA policy makers	Course books authors
Participant background	1	Years of experience, qualification, position, responsibilities	Years of experience, qualification, position, responsibilities	Years of experience, qualification, position, responsibilities	Years of experience, qualification, position, responsibilities
Perception on curriculum design	2	Were you part of curriculum design in the degree programme? If so, describe your role?	Were you part of curriculum design in the degree programme? If so, describe your role?	When it comes to language curriculum design, what do you think is expected from higher education institutes to do?	When it comes to language curriculum design, what do you think is expected from higher education institutes to do?
	3	What do you think OAAA programme standards and college standards are for? If you were a member in the OAAA programme standards committee/college programme standards committee, would you make any changes?	What do you think OAAA programme standards and college standards are for? If you were a member in the OAAA programme standards committee/college programme standards committee, would you make any changes?	What do you think OAAA programme standards and college standards are for?	What do you think OAAA programme standards and college standards are for? If you were a member in the OAAA programme standards committee/college programme standards committee, would you make any changes?
Programme purpose	4	What do you think is the purpose of the tourism and hospitality management degree programme? Why do you think students come to your college to do tourism and hospitality degrees?	What do you think is the purpose of the tourism and hospitality management degree programme? Why do you think students come to your college to do tourism and hospitality degrees?	What do you think is the purpose of the tourism and hospitality management degree programme? Why do you think students go to Oman Tourism College to do their degrees?	What do you think is the purpose of the tourism and hospitality management degree programme? Why do you think students go to Oman Tourism College to do their degrees?
Knowledge prescribed	5	Moving to a bigger picture, what do think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?	Moving to a bigger picture, what do think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?	Moving to a bigger picture, what do think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?	Moving to a bigger picture, what do think the ELT courses in the degree programme are for?
	6	What would be the core difference between the ELT courses would you say?	What would be the core difference between the ELT courses would you say?	What would be the core difference between the ELT courses would you say?	What would be the core difference between the ELT courses would you say?
Reflection on Curriculum	7	What is missing in these courses?	What is missing in these courses?	What is missing in these courses?	What is missing in these courses?
Learning	8	What is your impression about the state of learning that you see in your classroom? How do you think	What is your impression about the state of learning that you see in the undergraduate language courses? How do you think learning is taking place?	What is your impression about the state of learning that you see in the undergraduate language courses?	What is your impression about the state of learning that you see in the

		learning is taking place?		How do you think learning is taking place?	undergraduate language courses? How do you think learning is taking place?
Student's role	9	Describe typical good students you remember? Who are they? Give me examples.	How would describe typical good students in language courses? Who are they? Give me examples.	How would describe typical good students in language courses? Who are they? Give me examples.	How would describe typical good students in language courses? Who are they? Give me examples.
Teacher's role	10	Think about a successful class you had and tell me what you did? Tell me about the way you taught that class.	How do you think teachers should teach in an undergraduate language class?	How do you think teachers should teach in an undergraduate language class?	How do you think teachers should teach in an undergraduate language class?
Assessment	11	What do you think of the assessment procedures in the language courses?	What do you think of the assessment procedures in the language courses?	What do you think of the assessment procedures in the language courses?	What do you think of the assessment procedures in the language courses?
	12	In your opinion, how should examinations be?	In your opinion, how should examinations be?	In your opinion, how should examinations be?	In your opinion, how should examinations be?
Further comments	13	Would you like to add any comment?	Would you like to add any comment?	Would you like to add any comment?	Would you like to add any comment?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

I am currently doing a PhD in Education at the University of York in the United Kingdom. The tentative title of my research is *The Philosophical Foundations of a tertiary English Language Curriculum Design: The Omani Context*. The focus of my research is English language curriculum design at a tertiary institution. I intend to investigate the philosophical principles underpinning the undergraduate language curriculum design within an Omani tertiary context. Different documents and participants will be used to uncover these principles. It is hoped that the findings of this investigation will help Omani language policy makers, curriculum specialists, and teachers gain a better understating of curriculum design at the tertiary level.

I would like to conduct an interview with you. The interview will take from 20-40 minutes. You are encouraged to ask questions or raise concerns at any time about the nature of the study. The interview will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words. The tapes will only be heard by me for the purpose of this study and will be stored on a password-protected computer. The tapes will be kept for two years after which time it will be destroyed. If you feel uncomfortable with the recorder, you may ask that it be turned off at any time. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to two weeks after the data is collected. You will be given the opportunity to comment on a transcript of your interview. The information that you provide will be used for research and publication purposes only. Your name will not be communicated to anyone other than my research supervisor and it will not be identified in the reporting of the research. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study during data collection.

If you have any questions about the study that you would like to ask before giving consent or after data collection, please feel free to contact Sheikha Al Sheyadi by email sas558@york.ac.uk, or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk

I am grateful for your time and effort. Thank you very much for your participation.

Yours Sincerely

Sheikha Al Sheyadi

PhD Student, University of York

Your consent

By signing this consent, I agree that I have understood what my participation in this study entails and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that I can withdraw from the study during data collection, and that my data will be kept confidential. I am happy to take part in the study.

Signed (participant):

Appendix C: Access to research setting

Department of Education
University of York
York
YO10 5DD

14th October 2015

Oman Tourism College
P.O. Box 2008, C.P.O.,
Postal Code 111
Seeb, Sultanate of Oman

Research Authorization

Dear _____,

This is to seek your approval to conduct a part of my Doctoral Thesis educational research at OTC, which is in your jurisdiction.

The tentative title of my research is *The Philosophical Foundations of a tertiary English Language Curriculum Design: The Omani Context*. The focus of my research is a case study of English language curriculum design at a tertiary institution. I intend to investigate the philosophical principles underpinning the undergraduate language curriculum design within an Omani tertiary context. Different documents and participants will be used to uncover these principles.

It is hoped that the findings of this investigation will help Omani language policy makers, curriculum specialists, and teachers gain a better understating of curriculum design at the tertiary level. Committed to research ethics, the researcher will handle any collected data with maximum confidentiality and apply them for research purposes only.

Your assistance in conducting this educational research, whose outcomes may benefit the teaching and learning practices at OTC, is highly appreciated.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Sheikha Al Sheyadi
PhD Student, University of York
Email: sas558@york.ac.uk

Approval: _____

Appendix D: An example of Debriefing (A qualified qualitative researcher)

(CH - Italic, RE - Bold, PR - Underline)

- Interviewer: Could you please give me like an example specific example of a class you remember and you were really happy about it?
- Beth: Okay, let me think. Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality, we were discussing impacts of tourism to the environment. So, I put them into groups or pairs to brainstorm the ideas then we wrote them all on the board what they said in groups and then I gave them the PowerPoint. So, we went through point by point, okay, what does this mean, can you give me an example of this? So, and in fact most of the ideas that they had matched what was on the PowerPoint, so this is the way it was. And, then we did an activity where they had to watch a video on a tourism product in Ras Alhadd, there's a new one coming up. So, then they had to watch the video and identify potential impacts of tourism on that project in the future, so they were able to **apply the impacts that we discussed before that onto the project, plus give further examples as well.**
- Interviewer: Interesting. Let's move to the assessment procedures, what do you think of the assessment procedures in language courses?
- Beth: So far this is like my first semester teaching it this semester with Dr David. I think it's... the assessment it's a lot more flexible or lighter you can say than previous years, because before they used to have to have like two tests and then plus a final exam and they'd have an assignment linked with ITH, so they had a lot work. This semester they've just got a portfolio where they're complying all the activities that they do in class and students seem to be enjoying it and that's tends not so much pressure on them and then as a teacher it's a lot easier for us, not so much pressure on us apart from at the end then we'll have to do all the marking. And, then they just have a final test at the end, which is going to be an essay, so *everything that they've learnt they're putting it together in the end were they have to...* we'll give them a topic, a tourism topic in tourism and then they have to **use the skills** that they've learnt from referencing in text citations, summarising, paraphrasing, forming a list of references, and putting it all together.
- Interviewer: In your opinion how should examinations be?
- Beth: Well, I feel that there should always be *one final exam at the end testing*, you know, specific outcomes from the semester so to speak, and then throughout the actual semester there should either be one assignment or a test to check various **skills or topics** that they've taught, we'll they've learnt, sorry should I say in the semester.
- Interviewer: All right, okay. I think that was the last question unless you would like to add any comment about the idea?

[End of Transcript]

Appendix E: Peer Review Form (Two PhD students)

Each of these curriculum philosophies has different views about students' role in the learning process:

Classical humanism	Reconstructivism	Progressivism
<p>Students are viewed as lacking something that exists outside of their minds in the educators' discipline, something that is capable of being transmitted into their minds by the discipline. Educators focus on two qualities of students' minds: memory (which can be filled) and reason (which can be trained).</p> <p>Their task is to acquire the knowledge and to become aware of the rules underlying it in order to apply in new contexts</p> <p>Expected to move through the course book at the same pace.</p> <p>Encouraged to understand the rules underlying sentence construction, to memorize grammatical systems, to analyze sentences and resynthesize this knowledge in essay writing. Also to promote critical judgment of particular literacy texts, at higher levels.</p>	<p>Students are seen as constructive members of society. Students are viewed as raw materials to be shaped into finished products that will possess well-developed behavioral capabilities. Educators focus on the action capabilities of students rather than on students as actors in their world.</p> <p>The individual learner free to choose which tasks to perform on any given day.</p> <p>Learners have to learn to budget their time to cover all tasks in the various subjects they study. They learn by themselves.</p>	<p>Educators view the whole person as self-propelled agent of his/her own growth, and as a self-activated maker of meaning. They focus on people rather than on the acts or attributes of people, and on the uniqueness of individuals as they are in the present rather than as they might be in the future. These educators are concerned about processes internal to people, such as mental health and self-esteem, and talk as though they can visualize the inner workings of peoples' minds during their intellectual, social, and emotional development.</p> <p>Objectives and activities are determined entirely through negotiation, and the students have the real say in the formulation of their assignments, and how they are contribute to them.</p> <p>Participate in meaningful interaction.</p> <p>Learners as active participants shaping their own learning</p>

How do the following teachers view their students? Please analyze referring to the above-mentioned philosophies.

Teacher A:

I say that a good student, the most important thing for me is a person, he/she/whoever, who is ready to take responsibility, who is ready to learn. Motivation should be there. Yes, there is no doubt it's the responsibility of a teacher to motivate students, but the thing is that those students who are self-motivated, it's very easy for them to become life-long learners – this is our aim obviously – we do not want them to be dependent everywhere on teachers and on people. So if we want to make our students life-long learners, independent learners, then that motivation should come from within. Those students who are motivated, those students are respectful, those students who do the stuff on time, who manage their things on time, whether it's an assignment or whether it is a class task which has been given to them, coming to their classes on time etc. etc. So time management, being respectful, being motivated themselves and helping one another also. So there were good students; quite a few of them were very good in my classes.

Teacher B:

What's so special about this student, Okay of course his English is perfect; I'm not saying that because he's an Indian, Indians also they have that language but that student in particular is that he is the best, we call him "the star" there. He is the star there, but you see how humble this student, he's so humble, he is so polite, he never addresses anybody – if he addresses a man, a teacher, he says "Sir", he addresses a lady he says "Mam", "Good morning Mam, how are you Mam? Would you

like me to do this?" And so punctual in classes, never misses a class because I taught him in more than one module. He is so committed to whatever he is doing and above all he's very, very helpful, the kind of attitude that he shows towards his colleagues when it is a group work or something like that, he is never – he never looks at himself as somebody who is above them. He helps, he helps, he doesn't do it for them of course, he doesn't write their assignments or their homework, he doesn't do that, not because we told him not to do, but because he is a kind of person that he has certain ethics that, "Yeah I help but I never write for you" so I see that, I see that with my own eyes. So for now being – this is the example, this is the person that -

Your analysis

Teacher A	
Teacher B	

Thank you!

Appendix F: An example of data coding

1. School mission

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH	- To change the mentality of many people in the country to show them that tourism is all not what is it is set out to be.	Understanding and awareness
RE		
PR		

2. The aim

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH		
RE	Building on the skills that students need to assist them with other modules.	Building skills
PR		

3. Learning component

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH	<p>Ask them a lot of questions, Try to elicit information from them.</p> <p>Students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information</p> <p>- Presenting the information and sort of confirming with them their thoughts prior to me presenting the information to them.</p> <p>And, then I've always present the idea and then I'd get examples from them,</p> <p>- I ask them a lot of questions and I use that to get the information out of them</p> <p>We were discussing impacts of tourism to the environment. then we wrote them all on the board what they said in groups and then I gave them the PowerPoint</p> <p>- So, we went through point by point, what does this mean, can you give me an example of this? So, and in fact most of the ideas that they had matched what was on the PowerPoint, so this is the way it was.</p> <p>- So, then they had to watch the video and identify potential impacts of tourism on that project in the future, so they were able to apply the impacts that we discussed before that onto the project, plus give further examples as well.</p> <p>Started to know students like brainstorming,</p>	<p>Primary actor during learning is the teacher</p> <p>The desired result of learning is a change of mind</p> <p>The methodology stress on conscious study and deliberate learning, on understanding the particular knowledge elements to be learnt, and on conscious reapplication of them in new contexts. the teacher present data designed to highlight a particular rule. These are studied and the rule extracted and explained. Then the learner practices applying the rule in carefully controlled situations, before attempting to apply it in more open contexts.</p> <p>Stress on conscious study and deliberate learning, on understanding the particular knowledge elements to be learnt, and on conscious reapplication of them in</p>

	what did they know	new contexts.
RE	So, we worked together so that they could use all skills from both subjects to comply one assignment	Sts pace themselves through a predetermined set of tasks in a predetermined way towards perceived learning outcomes The ability to communicate effectively in terms of good grammatical habits
PR	Encourage students to be a little more independent not like spoon-fed the whole time. Try to keep my classes very student centred, not so much coming out of my mouth Students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information Started to know students like brainstorming, what did they know	Promote learners responsibility and sense of involvement Active engagement of learners Engage learner actively in inquiry, express their views Engage sts mind Sts are encouraged to reflect on their experiences

4. The role of teacher

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH	And we were focusing on giving them the information' Ask them a lot of questions, Try to elicit information from them. Students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information - Presenting the information and sort of confirming with them their thoughts prior to me presenting the information to them. And, then I've always present the idea and then I'd get examples from them, - I ask them a lot of questions and I use that to get the information out of them We were discussing impacts of tourism to the environment. then we wrote them all on the board what they said in groups and then I gave them the PowerPoint - So, we went through point by point, what does this mean, can you give me an example of this? So, and in fact most of the ideas that they had matched what was on the PowerPoint, so this is the way it	Transmitter of knowledge predetermined in advance

	<p>was.</p> <p>- So, then they had to watch the video and identify potential impacts of tourism on that project in the future, so they were able to apply the impacts that we discussed before that onto the project, plus give further examples as well.</p>	
RE		
PR	<p>she used to sit with other teachers who had taught the subject before her, they sit with her and they discussed what they did, what they covered and then initially she would follow the same ideas until she had a bit more experience in teaching the subject. And, then as she got to find out the level of the standard of the students she would then tweak or remove or edit some of the areas that they had covered.</p> <p>- Before submitting exams a whole group of teachers would sit together from the committee and go through each exam and see if they're meeting a particular standard.</p> <p>Students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information</p>	Teacher being reflective

5. The role of students

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH	Anything that I say, they have something to say about it	Emphasis on reflection and understanding of given knowledge,
RE	Try to communicate	Active role
PR	<p>Try to communicate</p> <p>Get involved with the teacher, don't just sit and listen.</p> <p>Anything that I say, they have something to say about it</p>	<p>Active role</p> <p>Promote sts sense of involvement</p> <p>Express their views</p> <p>Engage sts mind</p>

6. Content knowledge prescribed in the ELT curriculum

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
CH	<p>Academic writing, again it goes more in depth, it builds upon, they build upon each other in order</p> <p>and we were focusing on giving them the information.</p>	<p>Grading of content – from simple to difficult – linear design – content is determined in advanced</p> <p>Nature of knowledge</p> <p>Didactic statements</p>

<p>RE</p>	<p>Academic writing, again it goes more in depth, it builds upon, they build upon each other in order</p> <p>Intensive reading. That's all building on each other, to give the students the support that they need for their assignments. Because, what we do is for example, last semester students who had a content module like Introduction Tourism, Hospitalities semester one, we linked it with Academic English.</p> <p>So, we worked together so that they could use all skills from both subjects to comply one assignment, the actual writing of an assignment</p> <p>How to reference How to paraphrase They teach them about how to write a CV Preparing for interviews. That one based on communication skills, how to groom yourself Prepare yourself for interviews Get ready for them to enter the workplace How to summarise They were, the teachers were sort of helping the students to show them how reference, how to use transitioning words, cohesive devices</p>	<p>Linear progress through situations and appropriate language exponents</p> <p>Developing skills</p> <p>Nature of knowledge capabilities for action</p>
<p>PR</p>		

7. The purpose of assessment

Philosophies	Statements/words/phrases	Comments
<p>CH</p>	<p>We normally prepare the exams before the students come in, you know, we don't want to change the standard of the exam to suit the level of the students</p>	<p>The focus of the assessment is on group norms (not a fixed criterion, not individuals)</p>
<p>RE</p>	<p>One final exam testing specific outcomes</p> <p>Then throughout the actual semester there should either be one assignment or a test to check various skills or topics that they've taught, they've learnt</p> <p>We normally prepare the exams before the students come in, you know, we don't want to change the standard of the exam to suit the level of the students</p> <p>And, also every year they get the chance to change the outcomes, because sometimes the assignment is always the same, because it's meeting a particular outcome. So, this year she has tried to change some of the outcomes so at least she can offer a variety of assignments for the students to do, to submit.</p> <p>We change the outcomes just to offer variety because like I said before there's a specific outcome, which was always there for a particular assignment and then to avoid repetition and to offer a</p>	<p>Modes of assessment Summative tests to assess more global goals</p> <p>Purpose of assessment To determine what students can and cannot do, and how well they perform against predetermined criteria (summative assessment) To inform the teaching /learning process (formative assessment)</p> <p>The assessment is objective Purpose of assessment To determine what students can and cannot do, and how well they perform</p>

	<p>variety of outcomes or assignments that students could do.</p> <p>We'll give them a topic, a tourism topic in tourism and then they have to use the skills that they've learnt from referencing in text citations, summarising, paraphrasing, forming a list of references, and putting it all together.</p>	<p>against predetermined criteria (summative assessment)</p> <p>To inform the teaching /learning process (formative assessment)</p>
PR		

Appendix G: A Comparison of (Language) Curriculum Philosophies (Clark, 1987)

Curriculum components/features		Classical humanism	Reconstructivism	Progressivism
Aim of school/language teaching/learning	Purpose for knowledge	To promote general intellectual capacities such as memorization, analysis, classification, synthesis, and judgment	To promote social, intranational and international unity and tolerance, through enabling students to communicate with other speech communities	To promote individual development, and enable students to create wider networks of personal relationships. To learn how to learn, and how to learn a language
Content knowledge	Nature of knowledge	Didactic statements	Capabilities for action	Personal meaning
	Selection of content	Derived from an analysis of the structure of the language phonological, grammatical and vocabulary elements, plus literary texts of value Predetermined in advance of the course	Derived from an analysis of the learner's objective communicative needs Set out terms of e.g. situations, themes, functions and notions, grammar and vocabulary, often in a framework of the four skills Predetermined in advance of the course	Derived a series of activities and tasks of a realistic communicative nature, selected through negotiation with learners A bank of possible activities may be set out in advance of the course but much is determined as the course progresses
	Grading of content	Linear progress through structures sequenced from what is thought to be more simple to what is thought to be more complex Order determined in advance of the course Linear, cumulative approach to learning	Linear progress through situations and appropriate language exponents The most useful and generalizable first, and/or the most learnable first Order determined in advance of the course Linear, cumulative approach to learning	Some activities and tasks may be graded in advance on the basis of prior experience in using them Learner in control of order in which the knowledge items are learnt on the basis of what can be internalized Gradualist cyclical approach to learning, reintroducing elements in different contexts

<p>Learning</p>	<p>Methodological emphasis</p> <p>Common classroom activities</p> <p>Expected learning from students</p> <p>Result of learning</p>	<p>Raising conscious understanding of the underlying generalizable rules of sentence formation Deliberate practice and control of language elements</p> <p>Study and practice of grammar Learning of vocabulary Translation into and out of the language being learnt Study and evaluate of literary texts</p> <p>Linear cumulative mastery of grammar and vocabulary and application of this knowledge to new contexts Accurate use of written language forms Some knowledge of the literature</p> <p>Changed mindset</p>	<p>Forming good habits through practice and rehearsal of real-life situations in role-play Errors to be avoided</p> <p>Habit-forming drills Deliberate learning and practice of phrases of maximum use Rehearsal of target activities through role-play in the situations set out in the syllabus</p> <p>Linear cumulative mastery of situationally appropriate language, leading to accurate appropriate, and fluent use of language in predetermined situations</p> <p>Changed behavior</p>	<p>Providing the conditions in which the mental processes for spontaneous learning are activated through engaging in communicative activity Transitional errors accepted as a normal and necessary part of learning (Interlanguage) Problem solving activities in which learners are involved in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of their own meanings</p> <p>'Interlanguage' forms with errors, which tend to approximate more and more to native -speaker -like forms as the learner progresses Gradual increase in fluency Confidence to tackle new communicative challenges</p> <p>Changed mindset</p>
<p>The student</p>	<p>Role during learning</p> <p>Teacher focuses on</p> <p>Teachers concerned with students</p> <p>Viewing students</p>	<p>Passive</p> <p>Student's mind</p> <p>As they ought to be</p> <p>In relation to standardized norms</p>	<p>Active</p> <p>Student's behavior</p> <p>As they ought to be</p> <p>In relation to standardized norms</p>	<p>Active</p> <p>Student's mind</p> <p>As they are</p> <p>As individuals</p>
<p>The teacher</p>	<p>Role of teacher</p> <p>Standards used to measure teacher effectiveness</p> <p>Teachers</p>	<p>Teacher as instructor, explainer, transmitter of knowledge predetermined in advance, and the corrector of errors</p> <p>Accurate presentation of discipline</p> <p>Directly implement curriculum</p>	<p>Teacher as a model native speaker to be copied, and as organizer and manager of learning experiences predetermined in advance</p> <p>Efficiency of student learning</p> <p>Directly implement curriculum</p>	<p>Teacher as facilitator of learning, and as negotiator of lesson content and process Teacher and a responder to learner needs, and as encourager of learner responsibility</p> <p>Facilitation of growth</p> <p>Adapt curriculum (according to student's needs)</p>

	Media used during learning Intent of teaching	Didactic discourse To advance students in a discipline	Programmed instruction To prepare students to perform skills	Student-environment interaction To stimulate student growth
Assessment	Type of assessment	Norm-referenced i.e. compares one student with another in a rank order	Criterion-referenced i.e. compares student's performance against a predetermined criterion or against a scale of grade-related criteria	Individual evaluation i.e. provides an individual description of process and products achieved May lead to a statement in which the learner evaluates his/her own achievements
	Purpose of assessment	To create rank order of merit among the students To select an elite for the next stage of education To place pupils into relatively homogenous groups of high and low achievers	To determine what students can and cannot do, and how well they perform against predetermined criteria (summative assessment) To inform the teaching /learning process (formative assessment)	To assist learners to reflect upon their own learning process and their products, and to learn To promote a capacity for self-evaluation
	Content of assessment	Items involved the use of general intellectual capacities, usually covering grammar problems, and translation	Items sampling the predetermined goals and objectives of the syllabus. These usually cover structures and vocabulary, functions, notions, and situational activities, through the dimensions of listening, speaking, reading, and writing	Negotiated assignments in the form of process activities which have an end product
	Modes of assessment	Summative end of term or end of year examinations	Formative diagnostic tests to measure how well unit objectives are being mastered Summative tests to assess more global goals	Students asked to reflect upon and describe the learning process experienced during an assignment Students asked to examine the end product with the teacher, and reflect upon how it might be improved
	Result/report of assessment	A total aggregate mark converted into a grade for each student on the basis of the normal distribution curve A rank order of students	A profile for each student indicating the grade awarded for each dimension of the course (e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing)	An individual statement for each student describing the process and product of his/her learning

Appendix H: An example of materials in a lesson plan

Writing conclusions

The conclusion is the final paragraph in an essay. It has **three** purposes.

1. It signals the end of the essay. To do so, begin your conclusion with a clear signal, such as *To sum up, In conclusion, To conclude*.
2. It reminds your reader of your main points, which you can do in one of two ways: You can
 - summarize your main ideas.
 - rewrite your thesis statement in other words.
3. It leaves your reader with your final thoughts on the topic. This is your opportunity to give a strong, effective message that your reader will remember.

How to write a strong conclusion

Thesis: The cost of higher education is increasing and financial support for students is decreasing.

1. Make a prediction

In summary, the costs of attending college have been rising while, at the same time, sources of financial support for students have been disappearing. *If this trend continues, fewer and fewer families will be able to send their children through four years of college. This will seriously affect the future of many young people's lives.*

2. Suggest results or consequences

To sum up, the costs of attending college are up and financial support for students is down. Fewer and fewer future members of the workforce are able to educate themselves beyond high school. *As a result, the nation will waste the intelligence, imagination, and energy of a large section of the present college-age generation.*

3. Suggest a solution, make a recommendation, or call for action

In short, it is clear that the present system of higher education is in trouble. For many students, four years of college is no longer possible because of increasing costs and decreasing financial aid. *To reverse this trend, we must demand that government increase its financial support of colleges and universities and restore financial aid programs.* Our future depends on it.

Task

1. First read the following essay plans (Only the introductory paragraph and ideas for the body paragraphs are given.)
2. Next write a concluding paragraph for each essay.

1: Controlling Stress

Introduction

The busy schedules that most adults face every day have created a growing health problem in the modern world. Stress affects almost everyone, from the highly pressured executive to the busy homemaker or student. It can cause a variety of physical problems ranging from headaches to stomach ulcers. Stress, like the common cold, is a problem that cannot be cured; however, it can be controlled. A person can learn to control stress in four ways.

Ideas for Body Paragraphs

- A. Set realistic goals
- B. Take up a hobby
- C. Exercise regularly
- D. Maintain close relationships with family and friends

Conclusion

2: Studying in Great Britain

Introduction

People come from all over the world to the United Kingdom for their education. Some come for a year, while others may stay four years or longer to complete a university degree. Of course, the first few weeks in a new country are always a little stressful, but knowledge of a few British characteristics and customs can make life easier for new arrivals.

Ideas for Body Paragraphs

- A. It takes time to get to know British people.
- B. British people are very polite, so remember to say “please” and “thank you” a lot.
- C. The weather is no joke-it rains a lot.
- D. Cars drive on the left side of the road, so the traffic can be dangerous if you look to the left instead of to the right.

Conclusion

PowerPoint how to write a conclusion

Appendix I: Beth's Interview Transcript

- Interviewer: So, first of all I'm going to ask you about the years of experience, your qualification, your position here in the college and what responsibilities you do.
- Beth: Okay, teaching, generally speaking I've been teaching for a good ten years now. For the past, say five years I've been teaching a lot on contents, introduction to tourism, hospitality. My background is I have a degree in hotel and restaurant management at Oxford Brookes University and after that I worked in a lot of hotels in England, in London in particular. And, then I came to Oman where I did my CELTA in order to find a job here, so I've been teaching since then.
- Interviewer: Okay, so what's your position here at the college?
- Beth: Here at the college I'm a lecturer in tourism and hospitality, however I also teach in language as well. So, my responsibilities are obviously, teaching, preparing for my classes, advising students, guiding students, and many other things, yeah.
- Interviewer: So, were you part of curriculum design in the degree programme? Describe your role if so.
- Beth: In the degree programme I've assisted in like complying the curriculum, putting it together. I've adapted it over the years, but I've been teaching it, focusing mainly on specific outcomes, which would require the students to be familiar with by the time they've finished the course.
- Interviewer: Okay, so could please explain like more about the process you used to design curriculum for the course.
- Beth: The process. Well, normally I used to sit with other teachers who had taught the subject before me, they sit with me and we discussed what they did, what they covered and then initially I would follow the same ideas until I had a bit more experience in teaching the subject. And, then as I got to find out the level of the standard of the students I would then tweak or remove or edit some of the areas that we'd covered. And, also every year we get the chance to change the outcomes, because sometimes the assignment is always the same, because it's meeting a particular outcome. So, we've now this year I've tried to change some of the outcomes so at least we can offer a variety of assignments for the students to do, to submit.
- Interviewer: All right, so what do you think of the OAAA programmes standards are for?
- Beth: I think they're there to set a particular standard and here at OTC we are, you know, doing many things to meet that particular standard, like we have the quality assurance committee. So, before when we used to submit exams, before submitting exams a whole group of teachers would sit together from the committee and go through each exam and see if they're meeting a particular standard. We normally prepare the exams before the students come in, you know, we don't want to change the standard of the exam to suit the level of the students, so yeah.

Interviewer: You mentioned before that you changed the like outcomes even during the course and according to what and why do you keep changing these outcomes?

Beth: Just to offer variety I guess, because like I said before, you know, there's a specific outcome, which was always there for a particular assignment and then to avoid repetition and to offer a variety of outcomes, you know, or assignments that students could do. So, this I used to do with, we obviously have to drop(?) it passed Dr (Sahila) first and then fill out a form and once she's given us the green light then we can change the outcomes, yeah.

[00:04:35]

Interviewer: So, if you were like in a senior position and the standards in OAAA programme standards committee, would you change anything?

Beth: Would I change anything? Here in the college, yeah?

Interviewer: Yeah, whether like OAA standards or the quality standards, like would you make any changes?

Beth: As of now I wouldn't, because I feel like they've changed a lot from what we were in the past, so I see there's a lot of positivity coming out of what's, you know, what's happened. But, when you think about things like numbers of teachers for example, it seems or it appears that they're not like, teachers seemed to have a huge load on their shoulders. Which, I think is affecting the quality of teaching rather than instead of like hiring more teachers, that's what I feel, that is now compromising the quality of teaching.

Interviewer: Have you looked at OAAA standards before the... no?

Beth: No, not recently. I remember in the past I briefly, but nothing that I can, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, let's go to like Oman Tourism College. What do you think is the purpose of the hospitality and tourism programme in the college? Why do you think like students come to your college to have the tourism and hospitality degrees?

Beth: I think many of them are interested in tourism, okay, yes many of them some of their families are very anti the tourism idea of you know, low pay and shift work, but especially this year we have a lot students who really are interested as they see Oman tourism is developing considerably. So, they are coming here because they want to change the mentality of many people in the country to show them that tourism is all not what's, you know, it's set out to be, you know, so yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, moving to a bigger picture, what do you think the English modules in the degree programme are for?

Beth: Well, they're building on the skills I guess that students need to assist them with other modules, paraphrasing, summarising, referencing, the actually writing of an assignment, they need these to go along with their other modules, which they are studying in content. So, they're gaining and more and more skills to assist them with that.

Interviewer: According to the programme handbook there are four modules, or English modules for the degree programme, what's the core difference between these courses? Starting like with Academic English?

Beth: Academic English it's just very, well Academic English so far it's just mainly teaching them how to reference, how to paraphrase, how to summarise, the very basics I suppose you could say. Academic writing, again it goes more in depth, it builds upon, they build upon each other in order to help them get their reading, writing skills, synthesising, which they will need in the end to complete their dissertation if they do in the end go ahead with that.

Interviewer: Yeah, and then it comes like the intensive reading and writing?

Beth: Yeah, intensive reading. So, I think yeah that's all building on each other, yeah to give the students the support that they need for their assignments. Because, what we do is for example, last semester students who had a content module like Introduction Tourism, Hospitalities semester one, we linked it with Academic English. They were, the teachers were sort of helping the students to show them how reference, how to use transitioning words, cohesive devices and we were focusing on giving them the information. So, we worked together so that they could use all skills from both subjects to comply one assignment, yeah.

[00:09:11]

Interviewer: Do you know that the content of the English Communication Development module or communication skills, the fourth module in the degree programme?

Beth: The one with personal development, do you meant that one?

Interviewer: Yeah, personal development, yes.

Beth: I believe they teach them a lot about how to write a CV, preparing for interviews. That one I think is very much, yeah, based on communication skills, how to groom yourself, you know, prepare yourself for interviews and get ready for them to enter the workplace.

Interviewer: Yeah, okay. So, in your opinion what's missing in these courses?

Beth: In the English courses?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Beth: So far I think from my experience of teaching English, I think they've covered all areas I think to prepare students for the workplace are good so far, yeah.

Interviewer: So you're satisfied then?

Beth: Yeah, so far.

Interviewer: Okay. So, what's your impression about the state of learning that you see in your classroom? How do you think learning is taking place?

Beth: Well, here we try and encourage students to be a little more independent not like spoon-fed the whole time. And, I try to keep my classes very student centred, not so much coming out of my mouth I tend to ask them a lot of question, I try to elicit information from them. And, I feel, we'll we've seen actually, students seem to learn a lot better when you actually make them think rather than just giving them all of the information, yeah.

Interviewer: How very interesting. Okay, so describe typical good students you remember, who are they, give me examples?

Beth: Typically good students that I remember, you want the names and everything?

Interviewer: Yeah, it's fine to mention.

Beth: Over the years here I've taught, you know, different levels of students, but I still see some of the very good ones here till today, Maymoona, Iftikhar. This semester I have some very good students, Mr Rowa and Hasna. They're very interactive in class, they get involved with you, they don't just, you know, sit and listen. Anything that we say, they have something to say about it, they are very much trying to communicate, trying to give examples, you know, they've always studied very hard as well. So, they're a few good ones out there that I've come across with, yeah.

Interviewer: Think about a successful class you had and tell me what you did. Tell me about the way you taught that class.

Beth: I, okay, whether it's been in English, or Tourism, I've always started to know students like brainstorming, what did they know, eliciting information and then presenting the information and sort of confirming with them their thoughts prior to me presenting the information to them. And, then I've always present the idea and then I'd get examples from them, I ask them a lot of questions and I give them... I use that to get the information out of them. And, yeah that's the way I always do it and it's been successful.

[00:13:05]

Interviewer: Could you please give me like an example specific example of a class you remember and you were really happy about it?

Beth: Okay, let me think. Introduction to Tourism and Hospitality, we were discussing impacts of tourism to the environment. So, I put them into groups or pairs to brainstorm the ideas then we wrote them all on the board what they said in groups and then I gave them the PowerPoint. So, we went through point by point, okay, what does this mean, can you give me an example of this? So, and in fact most of the ideas that they had matched what was on the PowerPoint, so this is the way it was. And, then we did an activity where they had to watch a video on a tourism product in Ras Alhadd, there's a new one coming up. So, then they had to watch the video and identify potential impacts of tourism on that project in the future, so they were able to apply the impacts that we discussed before that onto the project, plus give further examples as well.

Interviewer: Interesting. Let's move to the assessment procedures, what do you think of the assessment procedures in language courses?

- Beth: So far this is like my first semester teaching it this semester with Dr Don. I think it's... the assessment it's a lot more flexible or lighter you can say than to previous years, because before they used to have to have like two tests and then plus a final exam and they'd have an assignment linked with ITH, so they had a lot work. This semester they've just got a portfolio where they're complying all the activities that they do in class and students seem to be enjoying it and that's tends not so much pressure on them and then as a teacher it's a lot easier for us, not so much pressure on us apart from at the end then we'll have to do all the marking. And, then they just have a final test at the end, which is going to be an essay, so everything that they've learnt they're putting it together in the end were they have to... we'll give them a topic, a tourism topic in tourism and then they have to use the skills that they've learnt from referencing in text citations, summarising, paraphrasing, forming a list of references, and putting it all together.
- Interviewer: In your opinion how should examinations be?
- Beth: Well, I feel that there should always be one final exam at the end testing, you know, specific outcomes from the semester so to speak, and then throughout the actual semester there should either be one assignment or a test to check various skills or topics that they've taught, we'll they've learnt, sorry should I say in the semester.
- Interviewer: All right, okay. I think that was the last question unless you would like to add any comment about the idea?
- Beth: No.
- Interviewer: The language courses here, yeah?
- Beth: Yeah, thanks a lot, Sheikha.
- Interviewer: Thank you very much, thank you Beth.

[End of Transcript]

List of Abbreviations, Acronyms and Terms

AAA	Academic Affiliation Agreement
AEMD	Academic English Module Descriptor
AQAM	Academic Quality Assurance Manual
AWMD	Academic Writing Module Descriptor
CH	Classical humanism
ELT	English language teaching and learning
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GFP	The General Foundation Program
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
IRWMD	Intensive Reading and Writing Module Descriptor
ISAM	Institutional Standards Assessment Manual
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NQF	The National Qualifications Framework
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OAC	Oman Accreditation Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Omanisation	A national strategy for replacing expatriates with Omani nationals
OTC	Oman Tourism College
PDCMD	Personal Development and Communication Module Descriptor
PR	Progressivism
RE	Reconstructionism
ROSQA	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
THMP	Tourism and Hospitality Management Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations
Vision 2020	An economic and social development plan (1995-2020)
WTO	World Trade Organisation

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