



# Ideologies Governing Teaching the Language Skills in the Omani ELT System

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## Abstract

Much has been written and published about teaching the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking & writing) communicatively and integrating as many of them as possible when and where necessary and the positive impact this can have on the second language learner's competence.

This research paper, hence, discusses this issue from an 'ideological' perspective with a particular reference to the Omani language education system. The paper triangulates data from different semi-structured interviews made with different agents involved in the Omani ELT system, the pertinent literature, *The Philosophy and Guidelines for the Omani English Language School Curriculum* (Nunan, Walton & Tyacke, 1987), which I will herewith refer to as the National English Language Policy/Plan (NELP), other policy texts and the English language textbook – *Our World Through English* (OWTE).

The critical discussion aims at revealing and examining the degree of conflict and harmony, differences and similarities and agreements and disagreements embodied in the various statements and the implications this can have to second language policy implementation.

## **Rationale**

On completion of their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) program, a large number of the Omani students join the various post-secondary education institutes every year to pursue various arts and science-based First Degree programs. However, while English is the medium of instruction in all the science-based courses and a compulsory subject in the arts-based courses, the vast majority of these students fail to demonstrate any communicative competence in using this vital international language. This is despite the fact that they have studied English as a foreign language for nine years prior to enrolling in these institutes.

When talking to some of these students on informal basis about the possible reasons underlying this problem, amongst the frequent answers one receives are the

inefficient teaching methodologies employed by the teachers and the poor design of the locally produced national textbook – *Our World Through English* (OWTE).

### **Communicative Competence**

There has been a general consensus in the contemporary literature about the importance of teaching the four skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) communicatively and about integrating as many of them as possible where and when necessary so as to help the learners achieve communicative competence (Harmer, 1983; McDonough & Shaw, 1993; Oxford, 2001; Bose, 2003; Faydi, 2003; Al-Ghamari, 2004). Many different textbooks and reference books have been written that demonstrate to the teachers and guide them through teaching the four skills communicatively and in as much an integrated manner as possible.

‘Communicative competence’, according to Hymes (1972), consists of grammatical competence – knowledge of the structure and form of the language, discourse competence – knowledge of the rules of cohesion and coherence across sentences and utterances, sociolinguistic competence – knowledge of the rules of interaction and strategic competence – knowledge of how to make the most of the language you have, especially when it is deficient.

Language, hence, is complex by nature, and communication, which is the ultimate goal of any language learner, is governed by context and social and linguistic rules. Grenfell and Harris (1999) write that language includes “procedural knowledge” and describe it as “... knowledge that underlies the numerous cognitive skills we have in solving multitudinous numbers of everyday problems” (p. 44). “Everyday problems” refers to the daily functional use of language as a tool for genuine interaction for the various walks of life, which mostly requires the use of more than one skill at the same time. Procedural knowledge is primarily knowledge about “how something is done” (Lyons, 1995, p. 28), which requires use of analytic and critical skills through the use of the target language. In other words, the target language is used meaningfully and interactively to achieve various purposes.

This paper examines from an ‘ideological’ perspective the teaching of the four skills in the Sultanate, as this examination has its implications to the Omani students’ English language competence development and second language policy implementation in the Sultanate of Oman. The literature and research produced about teaching the four skills (Al-Battashy, 1989; Al-Alawi, 1994; Al-Busaidi, 1998; Al-Toubi, 1998, Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Balushi, 2001; Babrakzai, 2001; Saur & Saur, 2001) falls short of offering any ‘ideological’ discussion of such a topic.

### **Research Questions**

Within this context, the following research questions are asked:

1. What are the key discourses in NELP about teaching and learning the four language skills?
2. What discourses and ideologies inform the views of the different agents involved in the Omani ELT system about teaching and learning the four language skills?
3. What are the key discourses in OWTE about teaching and learning the four language skills?

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

The major source of data collection in this paper is the agents directly involved in the Omani ELT system – GCSE students, teachers, inspectors, school heads and material writers. These agents represent various social, cultural, academic and educational backgrounds. Their various discourses about learning and teaching the four language skills reflect their diverse but direct and explicit systems of thought and conceptions of the world.

The four main questions which constructed the semi-structured interviews and aimed at eliciting the agents' statements about learning and teaching the four skills are:

1. What does learning English mean to you.
2. What does teaching English mean to you.
3. Describe your ideal English language lesson.
4. Describe your ELT syllabus.

Other equally important and substantial sources of data are the literature and the official texts and documents, which represent the ELT policy/plan as inscribed by the Ministry of Education and the Omani ELT syllabus produced by the same Ministry. These texts entail all sorts of information that form a rich and a fertile basis or source of data for this paper. All these sources of data reveal knowledge, ideas, beliefs and experiences and are used to contribute to the construction of a theory about teaching and learning the four skills in Oman.

*Our World Through English Teacher's Guide Elementary Level (1997-1998) and Preparatory Level (1997-1998)*, which are produced locally by the Ministry of Education, are two official support documents that were written by the authors of the national English textbook – OWTE. The guide written for the Preparatory level is also used by the teachers at the Secondary level. These two books, which discuss the 'philosophy' of the OWTE materials, are written for the multinationality teachers and ELT inspectors in the Sultanate. They define various techniques and methods for teaching OWTE.

Semantic and syntactic content analyses contribute to the author's general thinking and interpretation and the development of relevant hypothesis. There is a substantial amount of relevant information about the political, social and cultural forces influencing, driving and shaping teaching and learning the four language skills in the Omani schools.

## **English and ELT in Oman**

English in the Sultanate of Oman receives political, economic and legislative support from the government. English in Oman has institutionalized domains like business and the media and education and is therefore a powerful tool for modernization, national development and 'Omanization' - a process through which gradual replacement of expatriate manpower by Omani skilled working force occurs (Al-Issa, 2005b). This is evident in the following excerpt taken from *the Philosophy and Guidelines for the Omani English Language School Curriculum* document –

referred to here as the National English Language Policy/Plan (NELP) (Nunan, Walton & Tyacke, 1987).

... The English language skills of the Omani nationals must be seen as an important resource for the country's continued development. It is this recognition of the importance of *English as a resource for national development and as the means for wider communication within the international community* that provides the rationale for the inclusion of English in the curriculum (p. 2) [emphasis in original].

English, the only foreign language in Oman and on the national curriculum is taught in its general form in public and private schools. While it is taught from kindergarten in the private schools, it is taught from Grade One in the public schools. English is also taught in its general, academic and specific forms in all public and private higher education institutions.

In his case study about ELT in Oman, Al-Issa (2002) found that people in the Sultanate learn English for purposes like pursuing post-secondary education, traveling, cultural analysis and understanding, conducting business, finding a white-collar job in the private and public sectors and acquisition of science and technology.

The *Reform and Development of General Education* (Ministry of Education, 1995) states that

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

The discourse here is of science and technology acquisition, which require competence in English beyond the use of a single textbook or skill. The language of wider communication today has also become the language of science and technology and wider communication and a tool through which economic gains can be made.

The authors of NELP support the notion that students should be given space to manipulate and use the language in a functional and meaningful way. They also believe that one of the goals of the Omani English curriculum should be

To assist students acquire the competence to use English as a vehicle for learning and communication within the classroom, and as a medium of interpersonal communication in situations outside the classroom (p. 28).

The writers of NELP look at 'communicative competence' as encompassing "declarative knowledge", which in turn includes grammatical, pragmatic, functional and sociolinguistic knowledge. They also see communicative competence as entailing "procedural knowledge", which is believed to occur through providing communicative resources to the learner to help him/her use the language for problem-solving activities confidently. The three writers stress that the activities should help students "*comprehend, produce and interact*" (p. 21) [emphasis in original]. They state that Omani students need such knowledge and skills, as they have multiple purposes for learning English. Examples of these purposes quoted by Nunan et al. are getting a job, studying in English and establishing and maintaining interpersonal

relationships, which requires exchange of information, ideas, opinions and feeling, and getting things done.

The authors of NELP consider language and language learning as “complex, multifaceted and multifunctional” (p. 2), which cannot be achieved through textbook-based teaching, and consider language teaching as responsible for preparing the students to use the language in natural situations.

Nunan et al. support the integration of the four skills & look at them as *equally* important. They state that Omani students need to acquire proficiency in all four skills in order to use and record information from a variety of sources. Examples of these sources as provided by the authors are technological, technical, academic, social and cultural, which necessitate interactive language use.

Nunan et al. would like to see teachers given some breathing space to move beyond the syllabus and bring some of their own knowledge and competence to help enrich the learners’ learning. Teachers “... need workshops in which they can develop their own personal “tool kits” or “resource packs” to supplement the published materials” (p. 44) and help arouse the students’ integrative and intrinsic motivation, which the Omani education system seems to have overlooked, stimulate their interaction and ultimately help them use the target language functionally and communicatively.

### **Ideological Dimension in Agents’ Statements**

The following private education Jordanian school head, who has been in Oman for over three decades, believes that speaking is more important than writing. He bases his statement on his observations and long experience as a school head in Oman.

Many students who left third secondary with very high marks in English have failed to achieve anything in the English speaking countries when they went to pursue their university studies. They couldn’t speak actually ... we need to train the students to use the language correctly. We need to focus on speaking more than on writing.

Many Omani students specialize at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in science-based and arts-based majors like for instance computer, pharmacology, engineering, medicine, agriculture, economic and political sciences, information, literature, law, education and so forth, in English speaking and non-Arab countries like Singapore, Malaysia, India and Pakistan, for instance, where English is the medium of instruction at the post secondary education level. According to the figures obtained from the Scholarship Directorate General – Ministry of Higher Education (2005) database, there is a total of 930 undergraduate students and 591 postgraduate students in the English speaking countries. This is while there is a total of 856 undergraduate and 72 postgraduate students in Malaysia, Singapore, India and Pakistan. These students are sponsored either privately or by the Omani government. There is further over 100 Omani students attending different undergraduate and postgraduate programs in English-medium academic institutions in various European and Asian countries like Germany, Switzerland, Ukraine, Russia, France, Holland, Italy, Turkey, Romania, Slovakia, Brunei, China and Japan. All these students are required to attend a language improvement program for 6-12 months. Such a program costs between US\$ 10,000-15,000, depending on the length and the institution.

Furthermore, many Omanis spend their summer holidays in places like UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. These places require functional uses of English.

Al-Toubi (1998) conducted a research study, which included 82 multinationality teachers of English and found that learners in the Omani English classroom are not given opportunity to express themselves. He also found that the curriculum does not provide sufficient room for spoken language. He concludes that the Omani ELT curriculum fails to prepare the students for oral communication in English due to a lack of a variety of activities.

This school head, who holds sanctioning power over his teachers, can influence positive policy implementation via getting his teachers to provide more chances for using the language interactively inside the classroom. On the contrary, he can disturb effective policy implementation through getting his teachers to focus more on speaking at the expense of the other three skills.

Contrary to the school head's statement, the following ELCD official thinks that "... it's very important for the person to succeed in English if they read for the love of reading, not just you know read it as an exercise in order to be able to answer this or that".

Students in the Omani ELT classroom read single words or short texts based upon the textbook and the accompanying flashcards. While school libraries in Oman hardly keep English books or stories on their shelves, students in the ELT classroom read the textbook and the set readers, which are built into the ELT curriculum and which start from Elementary Six. Students are expected to read these and be tested in them. The graded class reader is treated like the national textbook – it is compulsory and the students must learn it and the teachers must teach it and finish teaching it before the end of the semester.

This material writer can influence policy implementation via including more reading texts in the syllabus, as domains of language interaction & use in Oman are somehow limited and so is the time devoted to English. While Omani students receive over the nine years just under 900 hours of formal English language instruction, students need in excess of 4000 hours to reach the level of proficiency needed for university study (Nunan et al. 1987). Reading, hence, provides contact with the target language and its culture (Al-Issa, 2005c), which subsequently leads to second language development and enrichment. This is a point, which the literature on second language education and the authors of NELP stress.

In contrast to the two agents discussed above, the following Omani public school English teacher, who has been teaching for over 12 years, believes that there should be more writing and reading in the syllabus.

I will teach writing and reading. At first secondary the student will be able to write as much as she's writing Arabic assignments, not just a matter of copying writing. They [the students] are given a plan, not just copy sentences and that's all. Also they should read more. Reading helps writing. They can become better writers later.

She is drawing an analogy between teaching English and Arabic. In Arabic classes more emphasis is laid on reading and writing than speaking. Students produce composition texts and answer questions in exercise books. Students are usually given a topic to think and write about. At the Secondary Level students are sometimes given

more than one topic where they pick one and write about it. Composition topics, hence, are not always based upon the textbook topics, although in some cases they are parallel to them.

Students also read long texts, questions, stories and poems. Krashen (2003) claims that "... reading anything will help all writing". Krashen advocates a "reading hypothesis" which rests on the belief that "reading provides writers with knowledge of the language of writing, the grammar, vocabulary, and discourse style writers use". School libraries in Oman contain a collection of Arabic books and reference books that present different types and levels of knowledge and language. Students are allowed to borrow books from the library. However, the case is almost entirely contrary respecting English.

This teacher can disturb effective policy implementation via focusing on writing & reading at the expense of the other two skills. Dove (1986) argues that teachers are most free from interference inside the classrooms, which makes them the sole interpreters of the curriculum for the learners, and which makes it very difficult for the authority to control their determination to resist policy implementation. By contrast, she can facilitate policy implementation via training the students to write & read more via assigning more homework or/ and designing worksheets, which encourage communicative teaching of writing and allocate more time for practicing writing and reading. In other words, she can bring some of her own experience, knowledge and skill to the classroom and supplement the syllabus in order to enrich her students' linguistic repertoire.

The following Sudanese public education English inspector, who has been in Oman for over 20 years, describes the change from English For Oman (EFO) – the textbook written and produced by Longman and used during the 1980s – to OWTE as "extreme" and one that presents the language in an artificial, superficial and tightly controlled manner. He claims that OWTE

... Neglected everything else and concentrated on the writing practice through what is called the 'skill cycle', which makes every lesson end in writing. But even that could have been a useful thing had it been real writing practice. Pupils are made to speak the paragraph, Have it written on the blackboard, have some words removed or rubbed out from the sentences and then they copy it down in their books. This horribly controlled way of writing remains as it is across the levels till the end of secondary level when students end up totally helpless to produce a single free genuine sentence.

Al-Alawi (1994) criticizes the education system in the Arab World, which Oman is a part of, and describes it as "authoritative". The curriculum is implemented in a top-down mode, which makes it very difficult for teachers to engage in any kind of change or innovation (Al-Toubi, 1998).

Al-Alawi (1994) conducted a research study, which included 959 students, 80 General Secondary Certificate (GSC) teachers of English, six regional English inspectors, two teacher trainers, 10 Omani English teachers and three experts from three different higher education institutions. He found that the teaching methods employed by the English teachers were governed and controlled by the Ministry of Education. He also found that there is an over rigid use of the teacher's guide and that the restrictions imposed on the teachers to use the teacher's guide had an influence on the methods employed by the teachers.

Al-Toubi (1998) found that the Omani English curriculum lacks authentic practice and materials, which can impact second language proficiency development. He further found that the activities in OWTE are of an artificial and controlled nature.

The written texts produced by the students are usually based upon the input text. This is what is known as the “skills cycle”. Students remain within the same ‘topic’ where they listen to a text about it, they read it, they speak it and eventually they write it. In other words, they think and produce the topic/book in a linear manner.

White (1988) states that some ‘topics’ require in-depth treatment and discussion and can mean different things to different people as they relate to different individual knowledge and experiences. Moreover, White states that ‘topics’ should be carefully selected to stimulate the students’ motivation. White also states that topics decided for the ELT curriculum are educational choices rather than linguistic choices. In other words, choice of topics is a policy decision and serves the transmission of “selective traditions” (Williams, 1989) and “interested knowledge” (Pennycook, 1989). The topics in OWTE are mostly about the local culture.

OWTE, therefore, guarantees all students receive common and fundamental knowledge through exposure to certain authorized and prescribed texts (Luke, de Castell & Luke, 1989). Language, hence, becomes subservient to knowledge and culture. Textbooks, in a context like Oman’s, are targeted to the entire student population, which makes them an economic commodity.

Teaching language from one textbook and using teacher-proof material reduces chances of language exposure and practice significantly. Apple (1993) claims that standardized textbooks have an ideological dimension as they help teachers overcome problems related to large classrooms, which is the case in Oman, where the class consists of a minimum of 35 mixed-ability students.

This Sudanese inspector can facilitate effective policy implementation by instructing his teachers to teach writing more ‘progressively’ and in a way contrary to the prescribed methods and techniques in the mandated syllabus. This can occur during the advisory visits the inspector pays to his teachers – three to four visits a year. Inspectors are powerful individuals with sanctioning power over the teachers, as found by Al-Issa (2002).

The following Irish private education inspector, who has been in Oman for over a decade, is critical of the writing exercises in OWTE and describes them as monotonous. She believes that

Kids were sick of them. Teachers were sick of them. I mean what was happening with these production models is that teachers were writing them up on the blackboard and then just erasing a few words and sometimes erasing none, and the kids were literally transcribing. I mean the whole series; a whole fortune has been spent on it. I think it has been an absolute disaster for the country.

Students here are not allowed any space to resort to their intellectual properties. Thinking here is suppressed and oppressed. Students are required to produce the language of the textbook. Students’ thinking, manipulation and creation skills are controlled and somehow marginalized.

The following GSC student states that he likes writing activities like “... notes, essays, reports, letters, something we use in social lives” to be a part of

teaching the writing skill. These are examples of activities that invite analysis, thinking, manipulation and creation of meaning, facilitate knowledge and message exchange and transmission, and which people carry out on almost daily basis and for functional and genuine purposes. Moreover, writing essays, reports and notes is something university and college students do during their studies and which integrate more than two skills at once.

The following Irish private education English inspector, who has been in Oman for over a decade, comments on the poor link OWTE establishes with real life.

The OWTE syllabus from Grade Four to Grade 12, personally I think is an absolute disaster. There was nowhere having to get the students to constantly ask each other questions ... I remember a very good joke about Prince Charles coming to the British Council and like everybody could respond to him, but nobody could ask him a question because nobody had been trained to ask questions.

OWTE starts typically with input work or oral presentation where the topic is introduced and new lexical items are learned. It then moves on to reading or listening where the students are required to read or listen to the text that was introduced earlier. The lesson concludes with a writing task where the students write what they have produced orally in the first place. It is more of a PPP (presentation-practice-production) model toward language learning and teaching.

This inspector can influence positive policy implementation via giving her teachers some breathing space and room to create and innovate. In other words, she can get her teachers to provide more genuine language opportunities for their students to apply what they have been taught. She has sanctioning power over her teachers and can give advice, directives and instructions about teaching speaking that allows interactive, functional and meaningful use of the target language.

The following British private school English teacher reflects on her experience about learning Hungarian. She values the importance of the four skills and believes that they have to be integrated and taught communicatively. She thinks that teaching the four skills communicatively has a stronger impact and bearing on the students' memory.

I think for me it's a matter of integrating the four skills in a very communicative way and by reinforcing the four skills and linking them altogether very comprehensively through as many activities and many fun ways as possibly can so that the students after five years can come and say I remember that teacher and I remember we did this ... and it was a real fun and I still have it in my head.

"I remember that teacher and I remember we did this" signals the role of the teacher as a dynamic and competent practitioner, who trains the students for such vital activities. The use of "as many activities and many fun" signals variation and flexibility, which are counter to textbook-based teaching and help arouse the students' motivation about learning English. It is noteworthy that private schools teach imported syllabi in addition to OWTE. Teachers in these schools have more freedom to supplement the syllabus and plan their lessons in the way they see relevant to their students' needs and levels, which can have its implications to the students' motivation. Moreover, such schools are rich in technological resources – computers linked to the Internet, over head projectors and photocopying facilities, for instance.

Furthermore, classrooms in private schools contain a maximum of 22 students per class, as opposed to a minimum of 35 students in the public schools.

This teacher can facilitate policy implementation via teaching communicatively & integrating the four skills. She can challenge the existing syllabus and exercise some of her own epistemic power over the mandated syllabus.

Moreover, the following Moroccan public education English teacher has been in Oman for over five years. He is a product of the grammar-teaching school, but supports teaching communicatively to help the learner use the language competently.

Language teaching is a matter of building a sort of communicative competence in the learner. To my opinion the most fruitful language teaching is the teaching, which could achieve the aims and make the learner a person who can deal with the language in a sort of natural situations, rather than teach him bits of isolated uncontextualized structures or bits of language that he can use in a fragmented way and without any sense.

This teacher perceives language as a complex system. He has been to an English-speaking country to enroll in some English language improvement courses. In other words, he was immersed in the environment. He values the role of English as a tool for achieving social interaction.

The following Omani public education school head is a product of the Omani education system. She states that Omani students graduating from secondary school and pursuing their university education abroad experience difficulties using the language interactively due to the faulty ELT practices in the Omani schools.

Many students who left third secondary with very high marks in English have failed to achieve anything in Britain when they went for their studies ... they have memorized the subject and they are good at answering certain questions, but they lack communicative skills in English. We need to be clear about the aim behind teaching English. Is it for the students to score 99%, on paper, or to gain skills that will help them later in their educational and academic and general life?

This school head is also critical of the criterion-referenced tests implemented in the system and the way the system gives priority to mastery of content over comprehension and performance (Al-Issa, 2005a). She is against the concept of managing English as a fact-based subject, which largely requires memorization. Students in Oman are required to speak and write the textbook, since this is the aim of the mid-term and end-of-term exams, which are almost entirely based upon the mandated textbook (Al-Issa, 2005a). According to Shor and Freire (1987), education conducted in this manner is much more controllable and facilitates quantitative measurement of learning. Exams in Oman promote reliance on memorization, which in turn narrows the focus of the students down to the language presented in the textbook.

Al-Alawi (1997) conducted a research study, which included 113 male and female Colleges of Education First and Second Year students. He found that 59% of the preuniversity students thought that they were not sufficiently prepared in English to attend college or university and that preuniversity English classes had little connection with the real world.

Saur and Saur (2001) argue that the kind of English taught and evaluated in secondary school is different from the kind of English the students need for entry to an English medium college or university. Moreover, Babrakzai (2001) argues that Omani students who enter English medium universities possess very limited knowledge of functional English. This is because they forget what they have memorized at school and because knowledge in the textbook is transmitted to the students in a linear style and is expected to be retained by the students.

As an individual with sanctioning power over her teachers, this school head can influence positive policy implementation through getting her teachers to teach communicatively and interactively.

### **Ideological Dimension in OWTE**

The Teacher's Guide – Preparatory Level (1997-98) states that “everyone agrees that language is about communication, and speaking is the most common form of communication” (p. 37). While “speaking is the most common form of communication”, it may not be the most important one. Learning English for the aforementioned purposes requires the use of the other language skills in an equally communicative way. Moreover, the tasks designed for speaking in OWTE are all highly controlled and lack interactive dimensions that encourage the students to express themselves freely.

Students in OWTE are required to produce three types of written texts: 1) narrative, 2) descriptive and 3) instructions. Another form of written language – literary language, for instance, has been overlooked here. This is despite the fact that different writers (Collie & Slater, 1983; Bassnett & Grundy, 1993; Ghosen, 2002) have stressed the fundamental role literature can play in second language development and enrichment.

Interestingly, the Teacher's Guide – Preparatory Level (1997-97) provides examples of the activities conducted in the textbook such as “... filling in the tables, completing sentences with a word from a box, or dialogues in which the pupils ask and answer questions using the language which they will write in the following task” (p. 27). All these activities are of a controlled nature, where the students provide information strictly from the textbook. In other words, they are producing the language of the textbook. There are obvious limits to the amount of linguistic and intellectual contribution the students can make at this stage.

The Teacher's Guide – Preparatory Level (1997-98) states that OWTE is a “topic-based” syllabus and that the topics have been chosen because the students find them interesting and because they are familiar to the students as they are taught in other subjects. The same document expects the teachers to help their students communicate about the topics.

Furthermore, the Teacher's Guide – Elementary Level (1997-98) asks the teacher to “make wall charts of topic related words in sets, e.g. food, parts of the body, etc.” (p. 15) to give his/her learners as much extra practice in reading as s/he can. It further asks the teacher to “make phonic word lists. That is a list of words which all contain the same sound” (p. 15). The Teacher's Guide – Preparatory Level asks the teacher to “make OWTE topic scrapbooks; collect simple articles connected to OWTE topics from magazines or newspapers. You could simplify them if they are much too difficult” (p. 19).

With a careful scrutiny of the excerpts from both Gudies one can argue that while teachers are expected to create and supplement the textbook, this is supposed to be within the topics, or the selective traditions and interested knowledge provided by the syllabus.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This research paper discussed the teaching of the four language skills from an ideological perspective with a particular reference to the Omani language education system. The paper triangulated data from different semi-structured interviews made with different agents involved in the Omani ELT system, the pertinent literature, NELP, other policy texts and OWTE.

The findings revealed that there are conflicting and disagreeing ideologies between the literature, NELP and the agents on one hand and OWTE, which appears to have been given undue power over the students, teachers and policy makers, on the other hand with regards to looking at the teaching and learning of the four skills.

Hence, the planning and implementation of English language within education does not serve preparing competent Omani users of English, nor does it appear to have internalized the powerful role of English as a fundamental tool that serves multiple purposes and facilitates Omanization.

To this end, there is a pressing need for a thorough needs analysis. Times have changed and so have the purposes and methods underlying teaching and learning English. The uses and values of English have evolved in accordance with the current speedy economic, political and social changes and demands on the world arena. There is hence a pressing need to carefully scrutinize, analyze and understand the needs of the Omani learners and the perceptions and attitudes of the practicing educators and design a plan that would facilitate positive change. Effective channels of constructive communication between the Ministry of Education, the students and the society is a prerequisite here to ensure that second language education contributes to an efficient and smooth transition to a more economically, socially and scientifically, dynamic, demanding and challenging world.

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