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Making a Case for New Directions in English Language Teaching Research at an Omani University: A Critical Qualitative Content Analysis Report

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Abstract

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has been the sole English Language Teaching (ELT) research enterprise in the Sultanate of Oman through the Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English degree program it launched in the early 1990s. Eighty-two theses have been completed so far about topics pertinent to ELT in the Sultanate of Oman. However, a review of those theses has shown that the discussion of these topics lacks a critical dimension that can advance Omani ELT at the micro and macro levels. This critical qualitative study, therefore, sets out to make a case for new directions in ELT research at the M.Ed. in ELT program at SQU. The discussion should lead to better understanding of the multiple ELT problems in the Sultanate of Oman and have implications for other similar contexts.

Keywords

Sultan Qaboos University, English Language Teaching, Master of Education, Research, Theses, Critical Discourse Analysis, Qualitative Content Analysis

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Making a Case for New Directions in English Language Teaching Research at an Omani University: A Critical Qualitative Content Analysis Report

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Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) has been the sole English Language Teaching (ELT) research enterprise in the Sultanate of Oman through the Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English degree program it launched in the early 1990s. Eighty-two theses have been completed so far about topics pertinent to ELT in the Sultanate of Oman. However, a review of those theses has shown that the discussion of these topics lacks a critical dimension that can advance Omani ELT at the micro and macro levels. This critical qualitative study, therefore, sets out to make a case for new directions in ELT research at the M.Ed. in ELT program at SQU. The discussion should lead to better understanding of the multiple ELT problems in the Sultanate of Oman and have implications for other similar contexts. Keywords: Sultan Qaboos University, English Language Teaching, Master of Education, Research, Theses, Critical Discourse Analysis, Qualitative Content Analysis

The English language has assumed great importance from different governments and contexts around the world for the last 4 decades or so and this has had powerful implications for planning and implementation within education. English has become the world's *lingua franca*, the language of globalization and internalization, a language of wider communication (LWC), and a fundamental tool for achieving various significant purposes leading to different economic, political, and social gains. However, its spread and penetration have never been neutral. English language planning and policy, according to Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) have been "linked to and informed by larger issues of political, social, and ideological frameworks that function in the context in which the LPP (language planning and policy) takes place" (p. 7) this has powerfully driven and cemented the associated imperialism and hegemony. This has been evident in the increasingly growing importance of English language education worldwide, and the demands for achieving English language teaching (ELT) standards and English language proficiency have been heightened at a time when ELT has become a multi-million dollar business and industry.

Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) thus criticize the lack of communication between policymakers and stakeholders such as teachers and parents and view this as posing serious challenges for policy interpretation and implementation. This is particularly the case in top down, highly structured, stratified, and centralized educational systems like the ones found in the developing world. Shohamy (2006) argues that ideologies in this part of the world are turned into practices by those in authority and certain selected voices and discourses are given a distinct edge and absolute legitimacy and power. By contrast, other voices are oppressed and marginalized due to economic, political, and social reasons. This, to Shohamy, can have all kinds of long lasting negative effects on national stability and development.

van Dijk (1995c), nevertheless, argues that ideologies, which are fundamental, acquired, shared, detailed, axiomatic, and complex, and sometimes negative and false, are not confined to dominant groups "to legitimate their power or to manufacture consent or consensus" (p. 139). There are many other ideologies in the society such as "professional" and "institutional" which are defined by certain categories like "identity, activities, goals, norms

and values, social position and resources” (p. 140). van Dijk (1995a, 1995c) quotes scholars in general and university professors and universities respectively giving examples of ideologies held by professional and institutions. van Dijk additionally claims that “usually specialized elites or ideologues will have a more detailed system than other group members” (p. 140).

To address this growing body of knowledge and practice, I critically investigate the content of the different Master of Education theses produced by the different postgraduate students at the College of Education Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Curriculum and Methods of English Language Teaching degree program at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) to understand what research directions currently exist and the implications of these directions for ELT policy implementation. From the results, I will further attempt to suggest alternative research directions to help improve the situation, taking into consideration the recent economic, political, and social changes and transformations the Sultanate has witnessed.

English and ELT Research in Oman

The Sultanate of Oman is a developing country, which like many other countries around the world accepted English as the only official foreign language. It has invested heavily in this planning for the past 4 decades or so, and decided to integrate English into its national education system. This planning strategy by the government has resulted in the importance and power of using English as illustrated in professions such as business, education, and the media. Furthermore, English as central has multiple and significant implications in values related to finding a white-collar job, pursuing higher education, conducting business, acquiring science and technology, analyzing and understanding the target language culture(s), and inter-lingual communication.

In spite of claims about ELT curricula being geared towards communicative language teaching (CLT) and the integration of advanced and sophisticated educational technology into ELT (Ministry of Education, 1999, 2008), research has shown that the experience of implementing English through education in the new ambitious ELT national plan in 1999 known as the Basic Education System (BES) has been problematic and thus suffered from major shortcomings (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Examples of these drawbacks, as found by Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) in their quantitative study of 141 BES graduates have been expatriate teachers outnumbering local teachers especially in the male schools, teachers teaching through the Audio-Lingual Approach and Grammar Translation Method, lack of educational technological aids and materials in some schools, teacher-centeredness, Omani teachers’ language deficiencies, rigidity of the syllabus, textbook-based teaching, exam-based and driven system, large classes, private tutoring of students, and insufficient time allocated to ELT on the national curriculum. While the last shortcoming has disappeared according to the two authors, others still persist. According to Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012), ELT in Oman has been a victim of theory and practice disparity, resulting in students joining higher education (which is conducted almost entirely through English) with all kinds of English language deficiencies and inadequacies reflecting badly on the economy of the country (Al-Issa, 2014). Oman’s economy, as inferred by Al-Issa (2014), has been largely dependent on an expatriate labour force, who hold an edge over the local counterpart in terms of English language proficiency.

In his doctoral thesis about the pre-Basic ELT era in Oman when His Majesty the Sultan came to power in 1970 and until 1998, Al-Issa (2002) highlighted the role of different ideologies taken on by different ELT stakeholders (e.g., students, student teachers, teachers, inspectors, curriculum designers, school principals, and Sultan Qaboos University–SQU faculties) and discourses with official texts in shaping theories and practices in the Omani ELT and the negative effect of this on the “Omanization” policy in the pre-BES era. Omanization

was enacted in 1998 and has aimed at replacing expatriate workers (almost one third of Oman's overall population) with trained Omani personnel.

Al-Issa (2002) found a gap between ELT policy and practice due to certain hegemonic practices adopted by certain professionals like SQU faculties, teacher trainers, syllabus writers, ELT inspectors, and teachers. He also found that there was bias exercised by these professionals towards certain texts, discourses, knowledge, and cognitive styles, as well as an illegitimate exercise of implicit and explicit institutional and hierarchal power and control over texts, action, and cognition leading to "mind control" (van Dijk, 1995a, 1995c).

Moreover, Al-Issa (2002) found that there was an exercise of suppression and marginalization of discourse and knowledge by these professionals, or policy implementers, beyond the prescribed and mandated national textbooks at a time when the identities of the citizens of the global village are fused through an LWC like English. This illegitimate and immoral discrimination and exploitation of the weaker groups and knowledge and conflict and struggle over discursive equality, according to Al-Issa (2002), resulted in graduates lacking a fundamental marketable skill like English. It further resulted in producing linguistically inadequate teachers with an evident lack of English proficiency to implement the CLT-oriented ELT policy and influence change.

Al-Issa (2002), therefore, recommended bridging the ideological gap between the various groups in the field to help improve the situation. He additionally recommended pursuing further research at the macro level to identify any additional effects of ideologies on the micro level, especially because the multi-million BES reform act has been in effect since 1999. The BES has expanded the allocated ELT formal instruction time on the national curriculum, introduced new locally designed and produced textbooks, incorporated sophisticated educational technology into the ELT system, restructured the ELT structure in schools and at the Ministry of Education to include senior teacher and supervisors respectively, and provided in-service teacher training sessions as a part of the overall teacher development plan to help teachers understand the philosophy of the new curriculum and teach more effectively.

ELT is a society in miniature and a subset and representative of the wider social system and is governed by communicative events, power relations, and hierarchy, and constantly evolving socially, politically, economically, and culturally, with language playing a pivotal role in this evolution. This wider society and social system is comprised of several agents and groups that bring all kinds of ideologies to the context, as they encounter difference experiences and have different knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, values, and needs, which makes them see and interpret truth and reality differently. Those ideologies can be true, while others can be false. Some ideologies, as manifested in discourses, will also reveal how institutionalized and hierarchal power is contested, which should help generate a theory about the influence of other agents and important stakeholders external to the classroom on ELT in Oman.

Thus, times have changed in Oman and so have the roles played by the respective members of the Omani society. Oman had its share of the Arab Awakening, also known as the Arab Spring or the Arab Uprising. It was as a reaction to the "political stagnation" the Arab nations have experienced for decades and the way their education systems manipulated and domesticated them about how to think and behave, while deprived them from their right to think critically, produce knowledge, question, and innovate (Faour & Muasher, 2011). The Arab Awakening started in Tunisia in December 2010 and soon spread to the entire Arab World.

Indeed, the Arab Awakening has introduced some fundamental and substantial changes to the entire Arab World region in general and the Sultanate in particular when it ignited in January 2011. The Arab Awakening was a turning point in the way the Omani people

constructed and perceived their economic, political, and social *status quo* and reacted towards rejecting it and demanding reform and change. The Omani people protested and demonstrated against corruption and the low salaries as compared to the cost of living and the high rate of unemployment. This subsequently led to some important political reform acts initiated by the Sultan. On the top of these came creating 50,000 jobs, changing and reshuffling the entire cabinet, dissolving the Ministry of National Economy, setting up a State Audit Committee, and granting powers to the 80 male and female members of the Shura (Consultation) Council, who are elected by and represent the people, to interrogate the respective Ministers for any violation of the law. These are significant changes, which nobody in Oman could have ever predicted or suggested happening prior to January 2011.

The Arab Awakening came to enable the Omani people to create space for themselves in the contemporary history to voice their different views, rights, demands, and objections against domestication and hegemony. During the Arab Awakening, the Omani people presented themselves as educated, intelligent, and mindful individuals with independent thinking and awareness abilities about the current affairs in their country. The Arab Awakening has redefined the relationship between the different classes in the Sultanate. It has given the Omani people the right to bridge the gap between them and the socio-political members of the elite class through questioning the political authority at the top level for their rights. The Omani people since the Arab Awakening have found themselves in a position to bring to the attention of the elite their weight, value, and significance as a respected social force on the local arena that needs to be heard when it makes demands pertinent to its rights. Put differently, the Omani people have developed a critical sense towards their country's situation and have stopped accepting being at the receiving end. This has forced a reconsideration of the space provided for the practice of freedom of speech. In other words, the dynamics of freedom as opposed to power, dominance, and control have changed ever since. Evidently, there is a wider margin allocated and more transparency practised at present to bring to the fore what used to be once sensitive and prohibited social, political and economic issues and topics, and critically discuss them in public ever since the break of the Arab Awakening. This is best noticed in the media, online forums, and electronic social networks and hubs, where alternative beliefs and notions are introduced and discussed to challenge the dominant existing ones. The Arab Awakening has helped the society find its voice and rid itself from a substantial part of contextual and discursive passiveness and overcome any reservations and restrictions once imposed by the authorities over critique of various top level officials and policies and suggestions for change and reform. Indeed, such a practice is now welcomed, provided it is carried out within the social and political conventions. One significant aspect of the social conventions is academic/scientific research.

Research at SQU

SQU was opened in 1986, as the only state-owned university throughout the Sultanate, and has been so ever since. It has remained the academic think tank and sole national research and researcher training and production agency.

His Majesty the Sultan has thus realized and emphasized the role of SQU as a research enterprise and acknowledged the fundamental role of research as a tool for development and emphasized it since SQU started functioning in 1986. Accordingly, different financial and technical resources have been allocated within SQU and at the national level to promote and advance academic/scientific research in the Sultanate, of which ELT forms a part.

In its vision statement, SQU “aspires to be an outstanding centre of science and research characterized by innovation and creativity, a university that is a source of Omani pride” (SQU website). The government thus views “innovative research” and “creative thinking” as

contributing to Oman's present and future economic and social development, with the English language and ELT situated at the heart. Research in all fields constantly advances and new findings are continuously reported as a result of adopting new methods and approaches leading to the generation of new knowledge and information. In his visit to SQU on 2nd May 2000, Sultan Qaboos Bin Said established a link across knowledge, information, and economy for national advancement. He emphasized the nature of knowledge as renewable and stressed the crucial role of inquiry and knowledge-seeking as a significant tool for knowledge production, national development, and continuous achievement of progress. He further considered suppression of ideas and repression of freedom of thought as a major sin and a totally rejected practice.

Master of Education in Teaching English Program

In 1991/92, the College of Education launched its postgraduate program, an M.Ed. degree in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English. Students are required to complete 24 credit hours (eight courses) and a thesis (worth zero credit). The number of accepted students has risen every year and now a 10-student cohort is accepted annually. The program prepares researchers with skills, strategies, and knowledge to critically analyze the ELT *status quo* using a wide range of methods and tools, identifying the persisting problems, and suggesting informed solutions.

Critical investigation is a fundamental and complex concept in education today, associated directly with research as a complex cognitive process and ideologies. van Dijk (1990) shows the close and complex relationship among social cognition, discourse, and ideology, and stressed the importance of investigating interaction among them. Down (2006) further discussed the close and complex relationship among critical reflective teaching, decision-making, and ideology and how studying, activating, and advancing interaction among all three can improve teacher education, which in turn reflects positively on teachers' theories and practices. Hence, one can argue that ELT is a complex and challenging activity that requires investigation from multiple interconnected social, psychological, cultural, and cognitive angles and certain theoretical constructs like ideologies and discourse which have multiple layers of interpretation and analysis and influence over different stakeholders' knowledge, actions, roles, and relations in different contexts and events.

Faculty thesis supervisors have always come from different academic, cultural, and social backgrounds. They have come from Oman, Yemen, Egypt, USA, and UK, with foreigners outnumbering the Omanis until 2012 when the ratio became 60%-40% in favour of the Omanis. All supervisors are holders of a Ph.D. degree in ELT with variable years of experience in teaching in Oman and abroad, supervision, and research. Their academic ranks range from Assistant Professors to Full Professors.

ELT Research in the Literature

Kennedy (2011) and Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) stressed the role of research as a bridge to the macro-micro gap and the gap between theory/policy and practice by thoroughly investigating the contexts, agents, and agencies affecting policy formulation and implementation to better the delivery of ELT programming. Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) described the role of researchers as ones who should try to:

- Identify case studies and best practices that focus on the formulation of macro-level policy and its implementation at the micro level.

- Produce context-informed research and theory that can be used by policy developers and practitioners.
- Draw connections between national, regional, and international policy frameworks to identify best practices for use by policymakers and practitioners.
- Critically evaluate existing, proposed, and past ELT programs to determine what is culturally and contextually suitable and develop methodologies relevant to the context in which implementer's practice. (p. 18)

This complex and multidimensional view of the researchers' role is particularly important in an age when many societies have gradually moved to a more "contemporary" or "emergent" class or a hybrid of both (Kennedy, 2011) and have become more diverse, complex, fluid, multidimensional, collaborative, participatory, knowledge-oriented, and constructors of multiple identities. Language and education have been central to this transformation with (language) education situated at the heart of all this change and transformation. Such development has been geared more towards introducing new roles, uses, values, and concepts about (language) education. Good examples are the integration of new technology, collaborative learning, the media, and CLT.

Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) pointed to the importance of critically investigating the most appropriate theories for the different contexts in order to guarantee the best practices, as not all theories are applicable to all contexts due to various political, social, economic, and cultural reasons. Pennycook (1989) argued that "second language education...is involved in a complex nexus of social, cultural, economic, and political relationships that involve students, teachers, and theorists in differential positions of power" (p. 590). Within the same vein, Holliday (1994) thus argued that the environment of the ELT classroom is affected by the educational environment created by the confluence of teachers, students, materials, and resources. He then adds that ELT classrooms lie within a complex and interrelated cultural network, which also consists of the host institution, students, and professional-academics, wider international education-related and national cultures. These cultures are major contributors to the ELT classroom and cannot be considered as a separate entity. The ELT classroom is rather a "microcosm" of a wider society.

Xu (2011) stressed the important role teachers can play in empowering their students to recognize the different ideologies vested in the discourses they experience on a daily basis and to think about them more critically as they develop their awareness and skills about communication beyond the classroom, where English has become an LWC with multiple uses and values.

Furthermore, Bahumaid (2012) critically discussed the pitfalls and limitations of CLT in the Gulf region, where Oman is located. He discussed setting unfeasible communicative teaching objectives, use of culturally inappropriate texts, and lack of English language competence by many Arab teachers. Bahumaid recommended conducting a needs analysis, which should help bridge the macro-micro gap. Quang (2007) thus stressed the importance of "critical" needs analysis of interests and ideologies underlying textbooks and curriculum design in particular, attempting to achieve equality by giving more power to those who are powerless. In the same vein, Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) emphasized bridging the gap between theory and practice through critical analysis of the existing respective cultures and contexts, which are shaped and driven by ideologies that can be manifested in discourses and take an implicit or explicit shape.

Unlike the "positivist" and "interpretive" approaches (paradigms) to program evaluation, the "critical" approach is associated with emancipation, societal power structures, and empowerment, largely based on Action Research (AR), and is much more ideological and

particularly useful in developing countries (Potter, 2006). Critical evaluation, which evolved from the wider discipline of critical social theory, aims at critiquing ideology and systems of political economy and democratizing, radicalizing, reconstructing, and transforming education into a progressive one through overcoming any existing traditional aspects of education and proposing alternative pedagogies and principles that meet today's cultural, political, and social complexities, challenges, and demands imposed by the current era of capitalism and knowledge-based economy impacting education in general and higher education in particular.

Those who employ critical evaluation approach and other approaches to critical works like "critical thinking," "emancipator modernism," and "problematizing practice" (Quang, 2007, p. 37), question ideologies and critique discursive mapping skills, to reshape expanding fields like applied linguistics. "Critical" applied linguistics (CAL) is a strong form of applied linguistics and a critical approach to applied linguistics and has a predefined political stance that problematizes social relations and aims at change through relating micro-relations of applied linguistics to macro-relations of power as manifested in society and politics (Quang, 2007).

Quang (2007) and Pennycook (2001) mentioned that CAL is concerned with constant scepticism about the ideological aspects of applied linguistics and ELT through questioning truth and critiquing inequality and injustice as hurdles to transformation and change, and the creation of something new to reshape literacy and language education. CAL, according to Quang, tries to go beyond the meaning of language learning, communication, context, text, literacy, assessment, meaning, and culture. There is substantial evidence in the literature (Chang, 2004; Cots, 2006; Hashemi & Ghanizade, 2012; Hudson, 2013; Manjarres, 2007; Sajid, Ahmad, Bhati, & Ahmad, 2012; Xu, 2011; Yaqoob, 2011) suggesting that considerable work carried out at present about CAL aims to develop a critique of political and social formations with emphasis on emancipation, rationality, and empowering the powerless through reflection on experience and practice. Quang stressed the important role of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a tool for CAL and calls for more critical analysis of the different aspects of applied linguistics like testing, needs analysis, textbooks, literacy, and language policy, and planning.

Mahboob and Tilakaratna (2012) pointed to "critical" policy formulation and implementation scrutiny and investigation, and the impact of this on situating ELT within a particular context and in relation to the wider worldwide context. Saarinen (2008) depicts the powerful function and effect of policy texts and discourses on social actions.

Language policies are thus important, authoritative, and powerful guidelines for practices, as both processes and products (Ball, 1994; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997). Taylor et al. (1997) argued that "policy documents are ideological texts which have been constructed in a particular context" (p. 43) and that deconstruction of policies starts with a recognition of the particular context. Gramsci (1970) argued that the articulation and production of ideologies occurs via discourse, as "discourse allows direct and explicit expression of ideologies" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 193). Ball (1994) wrote that as "texts," policies are "cannibalized products of multiple influences and agendas" (p. 16). Because policies are "crude" and "simple statements," as Ball (1994) described them, they tend to be treated and interpreted differently by the different social groups and actors involved at the implementation stage. Texts, as Luke (1995) described them, are "multidiscursive." According to Gee (1990) and Luke (1995), texts are powerful and influential paths to knowledge, ideas, and beliefs about a particular notion held or a situation experienced by a particular person or a group of people and the world.

Saarinen (2008) stressed that policy texts in general are not true reflections and representations of the real world. Saarinen argued that policy texts are artifacts that bring to the fore the goals and problems of a particular context, but do not tell us about methods of

implementation of the policy under scrutiny. In other words, without problematizing discourse and using it in a particularly critical sense, analysis will lead to general, biased, stereotypical, and superficial meanings and results.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In this section, I will discuss Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a proposed research direction at the M.Ed. ELT program at SQU and a theoretical or conceptual framework and a methodological paradigm, which when combined with the previous discussion about CAL, form a sound basis for the subsequent discussion about the current directions of the M.Ed. ELT. CDA, also known as Critical Literacy or Critical Linguistics, emerged in the early 1990s in the Netherlands. It is a field and a special approach in discourse analysis used to focus on studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of social power, dominance, inequality and bias by dominant groups and institutions. Critical discourse analysts examine the discursive strategies of mind control and how textual and discursive sources are expressed, represented, maintained, and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts, as much of social meaning is implicit, and hence, requires critical interpretation to unveil and demystify the underlying ideologies (van Dijk, 1995b, 1998).

Fairclough (1995) defines CDA:

The kind of discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (pp. 132-133)

Proponents of CDA see “language as social practice” and consider the “context of language use” to be crucial (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). CDA is an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, interpretive, problem-oriented, and methodological approach to analyzing discourse critically that can “be applied in a variety of disciplines and areas” (Hashemi & Ghanizade, 2012, p. 38) to unveil “patterned mechanisms of the reproduction of power asymmetries” (Tenorio, 2011, p. 187). Henderson (2005) writes that “CDA is useful for generating theorised understandings about aspects of education” (p. 20). Billig (as cited in Wodak, 2002), emphasizes that CDA has become a research program and “an established academic discipline with same rituals and institutional practices as all other academic disciplines” (p. 1).

Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, and Joseph (2005) view CDA as setting out “to describe, interpret, and explain the relationships between language, social practices, and the social world. Language indexes social relations, expresses social relations, constitutes social relations, and challenges social relations. Language, in this framework, is dialogic, intertextual, and historically based” (p. 376). Habermas (1967) considers language “a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organized power. Insofar as the legitimizations of power relations...are not articulated...language is also ideological” (p. 259). Wodak (2002) explains that language in CDA “is not powerful on its own—it gains power by the use powerful people make of it” (p. 9). Such people, to Wodak (2002), “are responsible for the existence of inequalities and who also have the means and the opportunity to improve conditions” (p. 9).

According to Wodak (2002), CDA problematizes the relation between texts and the social and “takes a particular interest in the ways in which language mediates ideology in a variety of social institutions” (p. 9). She further explains that CDA takes into account “the insights that discourse is structured by dominance, that every discourse is historically produced and interpreted—i.e. is situated in time and space—and that dominance structures are legitimized by ideologies of powerful groups” (p. 5).

Text, interaction, and social context are the three dimensions or analytical foci of CDA as proposed by Fairclough (1989, 1995). The first dimension comprises linguistic or discursive or communicative and organizational features, which are complex and feature participants and their properties. Wodak (2006) argues that ideology, which is embedded within discourse, controls the choice of words and grammatical structures people use in any society.

The second dimension is comprised of textual production, interpretation, explanation, and evaluation, and is focused on formal and semantic features of text construction. The third dimension is associated with the larger social practice and context, which aims at discovering how discourse is shaped by and shapes social structure and social activities (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Put differently, CDA, according to Rogers et al. (2005), “departs from discourse analysis and sociolinguistic analyses in its movement from description and interpretation to *explanation* of how discourse systematically constructs versions of the social world” (pp. 370-371). CDA, according to Rogers et al., further positions “subjects in relations of power...rather than analyzing language as a way of explaining the psychological intentions, motivations, skills, and competencies of individuals” (p. 371). Rogers et al. add that “each of these perspectives on CDA has been applied to relevant social problems in a wide range of disciplines, including policy, social work, linguistics, and education” (p. 371). In addition to being a powerful analytic tool for educational research and literacy pedagogy in a field like ELT, for example, Burns and Morrell (2005) discuss the importance of CDA as a literacy policy tool and a tool for literacy praxis in (language) education.

According to Wodak (1992), the major aim of CDA is “to unmask ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language in use” (p. 8). CDA, in other words, aims at examining “the textual and mental strategies” that “control the minds of recipients in desired ways” (van Dijk, 1995c, p. 24). The purpose of CDA is also to create awareness in humans of their own needs and interests to resist and break conventions and liberate them from power abuse and mind domination, management, and manipulation of other group members. This can potentially lead to inequality and discrimination as manifested in discourse, through self-reflection to help produce enlightened, creative, and liberated social agents with ability to resist such abuse, control, and hegemony over text and talk as resources of power, which may well be morally or legally illegitimate (van Dijk, 1993, 1995b; Wodak, 1992). Hegemony, as expressed by Wodak and Meyer (2009) follows:

In daily discussion, certain ideas arise more commonly than others. Frequently, people with diverse backgrounds and interests may find themselves thinking alike in startling ways. Dominant ideologies appear as ‘neutral’, holding on to assumptions that stay largely unchallenged. Organizations that strive for power will try to influence the ideology of a society to become closer to what they want it to be. When most people in a society think alike about certain matters, or even forget that there are alternatives to the status quo, we arrive at the Gramscian concept of hegemony. (p. 8)

“Hegemonies have ideological dimensions” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 95) and ideologies are formed and constructed as a result of exposure to and contact with everyday events and experiences (Gee, 1990).

van Dijk (1993), therefore, views the “core” of CDA as providing “a detailed description, explanation, and critique of the ways dominant discourses (indirectly) influence such socially shared knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, namely through their role in the manufacture of concrete models” (p. 258). van Dijk (1993) echoes what Fairclough (1985) states that CDA “needs to focus on the discursive strategies that legitimate control, or otherwise ‘naturalize’ the social order, and especially relations of inequality” (p. 254).

van Dijk (2001) describes CDA as having a clear, special, and specific social and political direction. Fairclough (1989) states that the major purpose of critical linguistics is to answer those “why” and “how” questions by critically analysing the discourse. van Dijk (1993) describes critical discourse scholars as “social and political scientists” and “social critics and activist” (p. 253), who “want to make a more specific contribution, namely to get more insight into the crucial role of discourse in the reproduction of dominance and inequality” (p. 253) and whose critique should be “general, structural and focused on groups, while involving power relations between groups” (p. 253); in other words, relating the “micro-level” and “macro-level” notions to each other. Burns and Morrell (2005) discuss the role of both levels of analysis to ELT and comment on how ELT as a social practice and knowledge source is constructed and shaped through texts. CDA, hence, situated ELT within cultural, economic, historical, and political perspectives and examined how all these interrelated factors impacted policy formulation and implementation. Both writers call for more studies of “critical language awareness,” “literacy education,” and “literacy research as discourses in and of themselves” (p. 10). To the two writers, CDA has the potential to transform classroom instruction and impact literacy empowerment of the marginalized groups, increase students’ and teachers’ efficacy, and humanize curricula and scholarship. van Dijk (1993) urges critical discourse scholars to take a socio-political stance. He looks at their work as “admittedly and ultimately political” (p. 252), which targets “the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice” (p. 252). van Dijk (1993) hopes that critical discourse analysts’ work brings about change and well-being to help “those who suffer most from dominance and inequality” (p. 252). This, to van Dijk, is what makes CDA “by far the toughest challenge in the discipline” (p. 253), as it requires “an account of intricate relationships between text, talk, social cognition, power, society and culture” (p. 253). Within the same vein, Ahmadvand (2011) describes the role of critical discourse analysts as making a serious effort to “clarify and denaturalize the hidden power relations, ideological processes that exist in linguistic text. They attempt to awaken the unconscious of those people who contribute to the establishment and legitimization of ideology through their ignorance” (p. 10). Rogers et al. (2005) additionally describe critical discourse analysts as those who engage in analyses that “move beyond description and interpretation of the role of language in the social world, toward explaining why and how language does the work that it does” (pp. 368-369). Rogers et al. further write that “critical discourse analysts begin with an interest in understanding, uncovering, and transforming conditions of inequality” (p. 369) and that their “starting point for the analysis differs depending on *where* the critical analyst locates and defines power” (p. 369). Critical discourse analysts, according to the five writers, “locate power in the arena of language as a social practice” (p. 369).

van Dijk (1993) bases social power on “privileged *access* to socially valued resources, such as wealth, income, position, status, force, group membership, education or knowledge” (p. 254), which “shapes our interpretation of the world, as well as our discourse and other actions” (p. 254). He sees it as involving control by one group over other groups in the society. Such control, to van Dijk (1993), “may pertain to *action* and *cognition*: that is, a powerful

group may limit the freedom of action of others, but also influence their minds” (p. 254) directly or indirectly. In the case of the former, dominance is enacted in talks and texts in specific contexts that it restricts access to communicative events, discourse genres, and speech acts. On the other hand, in the latter case, “subtle, routine, everyday forms of text and talk that appear natural and quite acceptable” (p. 254) are used by the elites, a class of people which hold the discursive “symbolic power” (Bourdieu, 1982) in the society to crucially dominate and control modes of and access to as many important genres and properties of public discourse as possible, and hence, indirectly manage the “ordinary” people’s minds and social representations.

Classes here, as seen by Bourdieu (1991), can be “sets of agents who occupy similar positions in the social space, and hence possess similar kinds and similar quantities of capital, similar life chances, similar dispositions, etc.” (p. 30). In the case of the ruling and elite, as it applies to this context, capital, dispositions and life chances are similarly shared.

The ordinary people become more or less, as van Dijk (1993) describes them, “controlled participants, onlookers, consumers or users” (p. 256). Power, however, to Rogers et al. (2005), can be “liberating” and “oppressive.” Wodak (2002) argues that “institutionalized” and “hierarchal” power as manifested in texts, are sites for different discursive and ideological struggle over planning and decision-making.

Research Questions

The aforementioned discussion has revealed multiple problems about ELT in Oman and the different agents and agencies involved in the creation and persistence of those problems. The discussion additionally showed the implications such problems have for ELT policy implementation and ELT improvement and the vital and significant role of research as a fundamental enterprise in influencing this. Within this context, the following research questions are asked:

1. What research directions have the SQU Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English theses adopted since the program inception?
2. What alternative research directions can the SQU M.Ed. degree in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English program theses take to improve the ELT situation in Oman?

Providing answers to these questions will help unveil and understand the directions M.Ed. ELT theses writers are adopting through their different integral and interlocked units. Researchers, like any other writers, have their own ideologies, which are embedded in their texts and discourses. As a researcher, I will bring to this study my own experiential knowledge and theoretical and research stances, intentions, and interests, which can be influentially variable. I have access to multiple resources as represented in information and data and agencies, through which I construct and present texts and hence shape the reader’s way of looking at the world. Research is typically composed of research questions, research methodology, and study population. These three units largely determine and bring to the fore my thinking and position about a certain topic and my way of viewing the social world and reality and the directions of the research piece and the social implications it can have for the community it is targeting.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to propose a new ELT research direction at the M.Ed. ELT level at SQU to help understand the various problems embedded in ELT in Oman at the micro and macro levels. ELT research at SQU has thus far been more concerned with looking at the micro level, which has more or less failed to portray a complete picture about the problems underlying the context. There is a need to critically scrutinize the top end of ELT in Oman and the ideologies manifested in the different discourses, which have powerful implications for ELT policy and practice.

It is hoped that the discussion and findings of this study will stimulate and inspire other researchers to critically examine their current ELT research directions and priorities and see beyond the existing situation. It is important to stress that while the Omani ELT context might be unique in itself, it still shares numerous theoretical and practical economic, political, and social characteristics with the neighbouring Gulf countries and beyond, which have accepted English as a *lingua franca*. The same can be said about the choice of CDA as an inquiry method and approach, which has the potential to raise awareness and educate people about critical issues of hegemony, power, control, dominance, bias, discrimination, marginalization, subordination, injustice, inequality, suppression, and oppression that have been receiving scant or no attention due to the prevailing hegemony and rigid exercise of authority and control by the elites.

Methodology

This critical qualitative research is driven by a combination of a constructivist and critical theory paradigms. It attempts to answer questions about “why” a certain direction to discussing the ELT problems in Oman has been adopted, and “how” this can be changed. This is achieved through adopting an approach of empirical and methodological controlled analysis (Mayring, 2000) of the M.Ed. ELT theses within SQU in order to make specific inferences (Krippendorff, 1969) from the theses about the research directions about ELT problems in Oman. Such theses are important academic and social texts because they are value-laden; they transmit the ideologies of their writers and legitimize the writer’s authority over the topic and field under investigation at a time pertinent to the emergence of a particular social and/or cultural phenomenon and within a hegemonic, hierarchal, and powerfully constituted institution like the university. Written texts powerfully project the writer’s ideologies that are embedded in his/her discourses. Postgraduate theses are linguistically and cognitively compact, rigorous, meticulous, and detailed scientific accounts and the construction of each and every part of them powerfully reflects a great deal of thinking, knowledge, and information about the researcher’s beliefs, conceptions, perceptions, and interpretations of the social world. Besides, all theses’ elements are knitted in a concise and integrated form which briefly and explicitly explain the thinking behind the construction and constitution of the topic under investigation. Put differently, a choice of qualitative content analysis, hence, was made to allow the researcher “to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 1). Here, aspects like the program students’ and supervisors’ *action* and *cognition* (van Dijk, 1993) and the socio-cultural and socio-political context (Mayring, 2000) in the Sultanate are taken into account during the data interpretation and analysis process.

Data Generation

A total of 82 M.Ed. ELT theses completed by Omani students have been found in the section allocated for the postgraduate theses at the SQU main library until the date of finalizing

this manuscript—June 2014 (see Appendix), bearing in mind that no theses were produced between 1997 and 2001 due to program revisions. All 82 theses are written in English and are research-based studies. They are mainly divided into five chapters—Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results and Discussion, and Conclusion and Recommendations.

All 82 theses are typed and clearly written and include the necessary details about the studied phenomenon and context and all the units and themes of the analysis and discussion, each primarily expressing an idea about students' ELT research directions at SQU (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The aforementioned discussion about CDA and ideologies and their application to ELT highlighted the centrality of studying and analyzing written texts to unveil the multiple layers of discursive and communicative sources of social power, dominance, inequality, and bias by dominant groups and institutions.

The 82 theses vary in length and are written in APA style. While access to these theses is open to all students, faculty members, and researchers, it is against the library policy to loan them. There is only one hard copy of each of these theses available on the shelves. It took the researcher, who is a staff member at one of SQU colleges, as many as 25 visits to SQU main library to read all the theses, with each visit lasting 4 hours on average. With such hardship in obtaining the data, I decided to photocopy the title page, which shows the title of the thesis, the year in which it was approved, the student's name, and the college name. I also photocopied the contents page, abstract, research questions, study population, and data collection instruments/tools. The length of the abstracts ranges from 200 to 500 words. While the content page and abstract provide concise information and an important overview about the topic of the thesis, the rest of the units—the research questions, study population, and data collection instruments—are laid explicitly in the first/Introduction chapter, which shows their focal place and strong and very close relationship to the conceptual framework of the topic. It additionally shows their influence to drive any choices pertinent to how the literature will be reviewed and the results will be discussed.

CDA is thus more concerned with asking “Why” and “How” questions to critically explain and uncover the underlying ideology in the different discourses articulated by the study participants. Study participants, within CDA, are knowledge constructors, users, and abusers, who possess variable degrees of power, dominance, control over, and bias about different existing resources and who exercise and manipulate all those to achieve hegemony. Nonetheless, in order to understand how this is done, the right research methods and instruments need to be employed to help generate a theory or contribute to an existing one. Selecting and applying the right data collection tools helps see how the research participants are situated within the study, the role and place of language and how it is conceived, and the place of spoken and written texts as social mediators and constructs.

I first created a “coding manual” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009) on my laptop for the 82 theses to help integrate all the units with their properties, understand them, compare between them, and track down the progress of the theses and see whether any change in direction has occurred since the first study was conducted over 2 decades ago and until the present time (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) stress the centrality of the coding process for achieving validity and trustworthiness and in content analysis-based research. They further emphasize that “the success of a content analysis depends greatly on the coding process” (p. 1285). As appearing in Table 1, the coding manual consisted of a serial number showing the theses order from oldest to most recent, year, thesis title, study population, data collection tool, and research questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This coding manual helped me create and develop a “coding scheme” to organize the data into “systematic, logical and scientific categories” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1285-1286).

Data Analysis

This study takes a “summative” approach to content analysis, as it starts with “manifest” analysis and extends the analysis to include “latent” analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) “...to facilitate interpreting the underlying meaning of the text” and “...expose previously masked themes, meanings, and cultural values within texts” (Thayer et al., 2007, p. 270). While this approach, according to Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), seems quantitative at the beginning, the aim is to explore the usage of the words/indicators inductively through condensing “raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation...by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher’s careful examination and constant comparison” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 2). This should allow for better understanding of the research directions adopted by the 82 theses and the implications of this for ELT theory and practice in Oman.

I moved “...beyond the observations themselves” and attempted “...to build a theoretical feature from that work” (Potter & Levine-Dorrenstein, 1999, p. 264). In other words, I tried to identify keywords before and during the data analysis that derive from the pertinent literature about CDA and ELT and my interest as a researcher (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I looked at the research questions to see whether any of them started with question words like “Why” and “How” and kept count of it. I also looked at the semantic properties of those questions to determine whether each one of them considered the micro and/or macro situation of the phenomenon under investigation. Key lexical items like “Why” and “How” for example, were highlighted in a different colour in my notes to simplify tracking them at the subsequent phase of this report.

Qualitative content analysis within this study assumes “sensitivity to the usage of words and the context in which they are used” and is “used within a broad discourse analytic methodology in the analysis of social reality” (Hardy, Harley, & Phillips, 2004, p. 20). In short, qualitative content analysis lies “at the heart of discourse analysis” (Hardy et. al., 2004, p. 22) and is “used in a way that is compatible with discourse analysis” (Hardy et. al., 2004, p. 20). Hardy et al. (2004) acknowledge that qualitative content analysis and discourse analysis are “complementary in terms of what they reveal despite conflicting ontology and epistemology” (p. 20), which according to the three authors, distinguishes research as “an exercise in creative interpretation that seeks to show how reality is constructed through texts that embody discourses” (p. 22).

Almost an identical procedure was adopted with the Methodology. I searched for key lexical properties like “qualitative,” “content analysis,” “ideology,” “discourse,” and “texts” for example, to determine the Research Method. I additionally searched for words beyond “teachers” and “students” in the Data Collection and words like “critical” in the Data Analysis, which are central to CDA.

Similarly, I tried to find in the Literature Review section the references cited to try and find names of authors, like the ones quoted and discussed in this study, for example, that represent CDA and its political agenda. I further tried to see what conceptual frameworks were constructed that would lend themselves to theories of CDA through identifying words like “ideologies” and “discourse.”

I additionally paid careful attention to how the Results were reported and discussed and conclusions drawn. I searched for key words like “social power,” “dominance,” “control,” “inequality,” “subordination,” “marginalization,” “oppression,” “suppression,” “manipulation,” “hierarchy,” “legitimacy,” and “bias.” While I looked for these words as lexical items appearing in their form in the theses, I tried to find semantic properties of CDA-oriented theoretical dispositions like “hegemony,” “control,” “politics,” “economy,” “culture,” and “history.” I also looked for interpretations beyond mere description and provision of

figures and numbers. I was interested in finding an analysis of the linguistic and cognitive dispositions of the participants that would reflect their thinking and conceptions of the world as articulated in their variable discourses and which are beyond the generally given descriptions of their respective contexts. Put differently, I was looking at the multiple discursive layers vested in the participants' statements and whether they were problematized, connected to culture, history, politics, and economy, and what implications they could present beyond the micro existing situation and context of the Omani ELT classroom.

I used my "reasoning abilities" to make sense of the identified multiple themes, categories, and properties to infer and present my meaning reconstructions and draw the necessary conclusions from the coded data using a combination of descriptive and interpretive approaches (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This is to allow for better clarity about the discussion of ELT problems in Oman (Denzin, 1989). Examples of research questions will be quoted from the different theses to justify the conclusions reached (Schilling, 2006).

Throughout the entire search process, I tried to keep in mind the theoretical concepts and linguistic properties of CDA in particular and ELT in general, as two rich sources of data and two established academic disciplines and knowledge paradigms, in order to determine the discussion direction of those theses. Besides, ELT is made up of different skills and strategies employed within different spoken and written texts that convey implicit and explicit meanings, which can be problematized and necessitate multiple interpretations and representations, when situated within a cultural, economic, political, and social framework, which makes CDA a suitable research analysis method and approach.

I created a four-column chart as a Word file to help me classify all the information and data as represented in the concepts and properties I extracted from the 82 theses. This helped me see the relationship between what I have collected in terms of similarities and differences and presences and absences and enabled me to decide on how I will proceed with my analysis.

English is thus a hegemonic language and its spread has been attributed to imperialism and provoked substantial controversy and argument. Similarly, ELT has hegemonic dimensions that can be found in its different multi-layered discursive constructions and practices produced by the different individuals and social groups occupying different classes. Both English and ELT are loaded with values and biases and have been used as cognitively and socially manipulative tools. CDA, with its powerful political orientations, can hence help unveil this when applied to a certain social context. Such integration of these two sources of literature is essential to help consolidate the reliability of the study (Mouter & Vonk Noordegraaf, 2012).

I, therefore, attempted to achieve theoretical triangulation through triangulating ELT and CDA as diverse theoretical fields to help achieve credibility. Additionally, over the years I accumulated substantial experience about ELT and CDA through developing positive extensive scholarly knowledge, field experience, and strong feelings, attitudes, values, and identity that have allowed me to make decisions about what data to collect and analyze, why, and how, and from which sources and reflect on these decisions. My theoretical and practical knowledge about ELT and CDA has further led me to provide "thick descriptions" (Shenton, 2004) of the phenomenon under investigation in order to construct the necessary meanings.

Findings

Drawing on the way the 82 M.Ed. theses are typically designed and organized, this section will follow a pre-designed scheme and pattern to facilitate meaning construction and interpretation (Potter & Levine-Dorrenstein, 1999). The three aspects discussed here will be the research questions, data collection and analysis, and topics and participants. Participants

and topics are interrelated and mutually determine and justify the choice of one another and powerfully impact the research problem and design.

Theses Research Questions

While none of the studies asked “why” questions, “how” questions appeared 23 times. By contrast, “what” questions were asked 145 times and “yes/no” questions were asked 115 times (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research Questions Types and Frequency of Appearance

Question Type	Frequency of Appearance
What	145
Yes/No	115
How	23
Which	1

Asking “what” and “yes/no” questions is a characteristic of descriptive research and often leads to positivist evaluation. The 23 questions asked with “how” were characterized by interpretation, explanation, and evaluation. Good examples follow:

- Thesis #66: “How do Grade Four Basic Education students perform compared to the minimum required level of performance set by Ministry of Education?”
- Thesis #67: “How do EFL Omani Grade Two learners produce phonics?”
- Thesis #34: “How do students perceive the effectiveness of receiving feedback form peers?”
- Thesis #69: “How can a curriculum enrichment model consisting of consciousness-raising tasks be designed for pre-intermediate language level college students?”
- Thesis #59 asks “How do e-portfolios enhance Omani EFL teachers’ reflection?”

Theses Data Collection and Analysis

Fifty four theses focused on measuring measurable activities of the investigated program at schools requiring quantitative analysis and evidence. In addition, 21 theses used questionnaires only, while 12 theses used a single quantitative method for data collection other than questionnaires like tests and checklists, for example, and 19 studies mixed more than one quantitative method for data collection like questionnaires and tests, for example (see Table 2).

The analysis of the theses additionally shows that while just 4 out of the 82 theses triangulated qualitative methods of data collection, one thesis (#7) used a single qualitative data collection method—observation. However, 25 studies used a mixed method and combined the quantitative/positivist paradigm with the qualitative/interpretive paradigm (interviews, observations, and content analysis).

Furthermore, the researchers in the 82 studies are familiar with the meanings and needs of the stakeholders involved in the system. This is due to the fact that the researchers are a part of the system themselves and have been involved in it for years and played different roles. This

kind of knowledge raises questions about collecting data ethnographically, which occurred only on one occasion (thesis #4).

Theses Research Topics and Participants

Topics tackled so far by the M.Ed. ELT students have been pertinent to teaching the four skills, grammar, vocabulary, phonology, spelling, assessment, teacher development, program evaluation, students' motivation, teaching supervision, educational technology in ELT, and textbooks and materials evaluation. The students of the program, as represented in teachers, supervisors, college demonstrators, personnel of the Ministry of Social Development and Vocational Training Centres, and personnel of the Royal Court and Royal Armed Forces reading for their M.Ed. in ELT have opted for different kinds of topics, which meet the objectives of the degree program mentioned earlier.

The dominant category of participants selected for the 82 theses are students and teachers/faculty members representing schools and SQU specifically. On extremely rare occasions, one can find college students external to SQU (#40), teachers external to the school system and SQU (#48), inspectors (#9), senior teachers (#16), and supervisors (#51, #58, and #69). Put differently, almost all participants represent ELT students and practitioners.

Table 2. Data Collection Methodology and Frequency of Appearance

Data Collection Methodology	Frequency of Appearance	Thesis Number
Mixed Methods (Qualitative and Quantitative)	25	1, 3, 4, 5, 11, 16, 18, 23, 32, 36, 42, 45, 48, 54, 55, 56, 60, 61, 62, 66, 69, 75, 76, 79, 82
Qualitative only (58 & 62)	4	58, 59, 65, 72
Quantitative only	54	Questionnaires only: 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 30, 31, 33, 37, 44, 51, 80 Other methods: 2, 28, 29, 39, 40, 41, 47, 52, 57, 64, 71, 81 More than one method: 10, 15, 24, 34, 35, 38, 43, 46, 49, 50, 53, 63, 67, 68, 70, 73, 74, 77, 78

CDA as an Alternative Research Design

This section will discuss alternative research directions for the program theses to help improve the ELT situation in Oman. The findings have shown that the way the research questions are formulated and phrased, the way the data were collected and analyzed, and the way the participants were chosen is very restricted and entails an agenda that strongly supports mere descriptive work so as to avoid any change deriving from political criticism. One, hence, needs to ask about what one could have found, had these three aspects been formed differently. Could a different approach to formulating and phrasing the research questions, collecting and analyzing the data, and choosing the research participants highlight the weaknesses, shortcomings, and biases of the variable decision makers and policy implementation overseers

to adhere to the described policies? Put differently, could it present a different reality about ELT in Oman – a more distorted one – perhaps?

How could a different approach to formulating and phrasing the research questions, collecting and analyzing the data, and choosing the research participants also bring to the fore issues that are difficult to of inequality, discrimination, and illegitimacy as represented in the inclusion and exclusion of certain texts, groups, ideologies, and discourses, and which have explicit and implicit power and control over ELT theory and practice in Oman? How might this raise awareness about the reasons underlying the poor ELT practices resulting from the discrepancies between the micro and macro levels? What might be the implications of instituting such practices in terms of knowledge production, political messages, and decision-making?

Theses Research Questions

The findings have revealed that CDA has been completely absent and marginalized at the SQU M.Ed. ELT theses production level. In fact, none of the studies attempted to look at the meanings, concepts, and realities of language and ELT knowledge, despite the fact that ELT is a social science, value-laden, and is governed and shaped by multiple ideologies and discourses. Issues underlying ELT in Oman were looked at through a solitary lens and a one-way mirror. English and ELT were detached from their social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Teachers' practices and students' behaviour were never problematized. On the contrary, they were viewed as value-free and outside these fundamentally powerful and influential contexts, which shape discourse and ideologies, and which can be sometimes false and subject to change, which makes the solutions suggested for the problems incomplete.

While the five research questions outlined in the previous section (#34, #59, #66, #67, & #69) had the potential to analyze data critically, none of these studies situated language within its broad social practice and context. They did not attempt to investigate how classroom language, constitutes social relations widely accepted and exercised in a traditional teacher-fronted, delivery-based, and textbook and exam-oriented context, and what causes this to happen in a hegemonic context where certain voices are superior to others and where the textbook and teacher's knowledge is viewed as unquestionable and infallible and typically legitimized by means of age, position, education, and knowledge.

Critical analysis of the data, by contrast, could have revealed how the dominant groups (teachers) marginalize the ruled class's (students) interests and needs and abuse the powers, authorities, and privileges given to them as educators, older, and more knowledgeable, qualified, and skilled individuals than their students. This is best achieved through sabotaging language knowledge and using it to suppress and oppress their students' cognitive abilities and domesticate their minds due to certain technical reasons related to their competence, for instance, as found by Al-Issa (2002).

The aforementioned studies further failed to examine how control is practised, by whom, and against who and how access to knowledge is provided and what the implications of this on a CLT-oriented plan like the BES are, which stresses the teacher's competence and professionalism, promotes a student-centered philosophy, and supports exposure to authentic language from sources other than the mandated textbook and teacher. Admittedly, while discussing issues of power and control can be sensitive in a Third World and developing country like Oman, due to involving political, economic, and cultural dimensions, His Majesty the Sultan invited and supported freedom of thought in general and researchers in particular over 14 years ago to scientifically and academically scrutinize and solve these problems to help produce, reproduce, and disseminate knowledge to advance nationalization and modernization. Problems of teacher-centeredness, textbook sacredness and centrality, knowledge control and

its unidirectional delivery, and exam-dominance are distinguished characteristics of the Omani higher education too, when bearing in mind the questions quoted from thesis #69. This situation has created a gap between the job market requirements and SQU graduates and has negatively affected Omanization.

Thus, focusing on issues of knowledge control and management would have explained the gap between ELT policy and practice leading to the mismatch between the classroom practices and the job market expectations, needs, and demands. Such focus would have clearly explained the uses and values of English in Oman and the practices preventing this from being clearly visible and recognized. In addition, focus on knowledge control and management would have explained the discursive struggle for space in the Omani ELT classroom. It would have explained the dynamic role of students as meaning and knowledge constructors and negotiators and the role of teachers as creators of space for knowledge dissemination, or otherwise, and their key role as interpreters of ELT philosophy and makers of breakers of ELT policy and the possible reasons underlying this.

The question quoted from study #59, for example, has failed to critically analyze how teachers can be empowered through embracing critical reflective practice to develop as autonomous professionals and critical thinkers with the ability to look at their existing contexts through a critical lens. A “critical lens” involves looking at the political, economic, and cultural aspects governing ELT in Oman. Such discussion perspective could have placed the studies within a more sophisticated framework and added a new and different analytical dimension to the issues in question. This is bound to help teachers resist and rid themselves from any negatively influential constraints like the teacher’s guide and influential colleagues or administrators, for example, and prepare their students as effective agents of change for a globalized world. Critical analysis, on the contrary, could have brought to the fore how institutionalized and hierarchal power are exercised and abused and how language is used to achieve purposes other than communication. Such analysis could have also explained how awareness can be created amongst teachers to pursue meeting their students’ needs and interests as cornerstones of achieving equality in the classroom and beyond.

The findings have also shown that Research Methodology in general and the research questions fell short to take on board several significant aspects pertinent to power, bias, and inequality, that have the potential to convert the ELT enterprise in Oman into a critical one with more potential to solve social problems. Nonetheless, a “critical” ELT in Oman means questioning and challenging the *status quo* as represented in the illegitimate mind control and cognitive colonization exercised by the hegemonic minority elite over the ruled, controlled, and consuming majority through selective and interested discourses. This can present a distorted reality about ELT in the Sultanate and can potentially stimulate others’ thinking about the legitimacy of the current thinking and practices of the so minority

P. White (2013) discusses how the literature highlights the importance of research questions as a reflection of the researchers’ commitment to social justice and political commitment “to help shape and direct all aspects of the research act” (p. 217). The author additionally argues that different writers consider qualitative researchers as discoverers and knowledge generators through taking sides and having a “set of values” (p. 217), as this determines what is researched and how, and helps them to empower others and themselves and influence emancipation and foster change. However, P. White (2013) comments that “habits of thought cultivated within disciplines of groups of researchers can interfere with the discovery of the new and unexpected” (p. 216). One can argue that the researchers within this study have brought to the context their ideological biases, which stem from the way ELT is constructed and practiced in Oman. Had not the educational system in general and the ELT system in particular in the Sultanate succeeded through their rigidly hegemonic practices in domesticating and socializing the ordinary people and converting them into users of the elites’

ideologies and discourses, one could have expected more “evocative” research questions leading to unexpected answers,

Issues of power struggle, discrimination, bias, inequality, and immorality thus have their roots in the history of the Arab World (Faour & Muasher, 2011). Such drawbacks could be explored through the discursive investigation of the different agents in order to understand what ideologies are manifested in those discourses, how they affect ELT planning and decision-making, and help generate a new theory, rather than test and confirm an existing one, where the results are sometimes predictable and do not always significantly contribute to knowledge.

“Evocative” research questions, according to Watts (2001), “*engage with challenging topics*: they pose innovative approaches to the exploration of problems, and because of this the answers found are far from obvious” (p. 14). Watts (2001) writes that evocative questions are “...distilled from very contemporary social or theoretical concerns” (p. 14). Evocative research questions, according to Watts (2001), approach “an old problem in a refreshingly new way, or propose a surprising angle of analysis on a difficult dilemma” (p. 14), as it is argued in this study.

The “surprising angle of analysis” can be associated with the role of the multiple ELT contesting ideologies for power and control, which, in turn, can lead to bringing strong images and feelings towards the views of the agents at the micro and macro levels. Evocative research questions within CDA have the potential to highlight the political and cultural agendas embraced by the different agents involved in theorizing and practicing ELT and could invite more evocative research questions and allow for the emergence of different critical investigation perspective about ELT.

Asking evocative questions, hence, has important implications for explaining why teachers in the Omani ELT classrooms adopt certain practices, why students play certain roles, why certain knowledge has been given legitimacy over the rest, and why some ideologies and discourses are given supremacy over others. Asking evocative questions within the context in question can expose the fact that the multimillion US dollar BES project has so far largely failed to address the almost 44-year-old Omani ELT concerns and fulfill its national aims and aspirations due to micro-macro levels contentions. It can also bring to light that remedying the situation is an uphill struggle and a colossal challenge that has to be problematized and requires better understanding and deeper analysis of the existing problems and bridging the micro-macro level gap in order to yield the aspired results. Such problems and shortcomings have had their negative implications for Omanization, an unsatisfactory fact that can be largely uncovered through taking a different approach to formulating the research questions.

Theses Data Collection and Analysis

While interpretive analysis is one of the analysis strategies and paradigms adopted by CDA, none of the studies attempted to go against the grain and look critically at the multiple interpretations embedded in the different discourses and texts. The analysis of the data collected qualitatively lacks depth and is confined to looking at language within a narrow classroom “functional” perspective. Meanwhile, such a stance fails to locate language within a practical social context and see the effect of language as a historically dominant force on the indexing, expression, constitution, and challenges of social relations. One can argue that had that been taken into account, a clearer picture would have been portrayed about the topics discussed in many of those theses and a new theory would have emerged about ELT in Oman.

“Critical” qualitative content analysis within this article is thus more concerned with textual and discursive analysis in order to investigate the ideologies manifested in both. The aim of critical content analysis is to find out who said what, to whom, why, to what extent and with what effect. In qualitative text content analysis, texts are systematically studied for

authorship, properties, and meaning, and are based upon lived knowledge and experiences leading to better understanding of social reality scientifically and subjectively, as represented in "...motives, attitudes, or values" (Sarantakos, 1993, p. 211).

Critical discursive and textual and critical content analysis, as related to ELT in Oman, can hence reveal significant information and provide unique insights about the political, economic, social, and cultural forces steering and shaping ELT in Oman. It can further reveal how texts and discourses are manipulated to serve the needs and interests of certain groups of people through presenting certain "interested knowledge" (Pennycook, 1989) and selective traditions" (Williams, 1989). This is bound to support the development of new theories and models about ELT in Oman in the BES era. It can also help validate the existing theories and provide "thick descriptions of particular settings or phenomena" (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p. 317).

Tight as cited in Saarinen (2008), is surprised by the fact that limited documentary analysis is done in higher education research, although much of the data is textual. Within the SQU M.Ed. ELT program, there is evidently neither sufficient critical content analysis conducted, nor textual data extracted. The very limited consideration of this data collection tool in the 82 theses reviewed could be attributed to the choices made by the program students. Choice of such a method of data analysis, according to Krauss (2005), is largely defined by the researcher's underlying belief system, which is guided and directed by personal experience and knowledge.

Thus, texts coming from individual or collective authorities have always been considered as sacred and infallible and the only source of knowledge in the Arab World, which has had negative implications for the ruled groups' critical thinking abilities and converted them into mere knowledge recipients and users. By contrast, it has consolidated and further cemented the position and status of the ruling classes as the sole owners and creators of knowledge and the most knowledgeable theorizers. Critical text and content analysis have the potential to highlight all these issues and their effect on ELT planning and decision-making.

One can thus argue about the guidance and advice provided by the respective supervisors and their knowledge about CDA and ELT in Oman. It is noteworthy that those supervisors are graduates of English-speaking countries, but their theoretical knowledge about ELT in Oman surpasses their practical knowledge since none of them has taught at Omani schools before. Besides, none of those supervisors has ever used CDA as a methodological approach in his/her scholarly published work. Tanaka (2009) thus stresses the power bases of the "traditional academic" (Grant, 2005) theses supervisors at the postgraduate level as advisors, instructors, references, and experts about their fields. This form of power is based upon status and position and vests oppressive institutionalized and hierarchal influence, dominance, control, and hegemony over knowledge and education and limits access to them. This form of power further limits the other group's action and cognition and manages and manipulates them, which leads to negative implications for policy interpretation and implementation. Shaping certain members of the society, like students, to become negative recipients of knowledge, due to implementation of traditional and oppressive pedagogy, which supports mind dominance and colonization, has been particularly evident in the Arab World and has powerful ideological roots deeply embedded in history and culture (Faour & Muasher, 2011). Such immoral and illegitimate practices have contributed to backwardness of the Arab World in different scientific and developmental aspects.

One can hence ask about how a creative and enlightened researcher can address unfairness and injustice with an open mind within a particular lived context leading to empowering thinking about theory and practice. One answer to this question is "critical" ethnography. Critical ethnography emerged in England in 1971. Critical ethnographers resist domestication and bring to light the unseen operations of control and power. This allows

understanding of behaviour and beliefs of the domains concerned and reporting injustice, dominance, and power abuse. Ethnographers within the critical paradigm reflect on their selves and the cultural and human agencies, which they are immersed in and which are governed by multiple ideologies and discourses (Anderson, 1989). This puts them in a position to empower individuals and initiate reform and transformation leading to freeing them "...from sources of domination and repression" that can have their roots in history (Anderson, 1989).

One can thus argue that a critical ethnographer can investigate roles of students, teachers, senior teachers, supervisors, and school administrators, like principals, for example, in the new BES CLT-oriented policy and how they are reproduced in relation to the new curriculum and how institutional and hierarchal power relations and discourses and ideologies are constituted, where different agents have different degrees of sanction power and socialization effect on each other. Canagarajah (2006) stresses the importance of the ethnographers' work and contributions "...to the formation or revision of language policies" (p. 159) and the "surprising findings" it can bring about "language relationships" to policy makers.

Another answer to the aforementioned question about using critical reflective thinking powers to address unfairness and injustice in a particular society can be Action Research (AR). In fact, none of the studies took a form of AR, although AR, as an interactive and open inquiry that challenges traditional social science, is a tool for organizational awareness, change, transformation, and social justice (Torbert & Associates, 2004) and a tool with liberating and democratic values and moral and ethical representations and constructions (Pike, 2002). This is best achieved through critically reflecting on the validity of strategies, knowledge, and practices allowing for new meanings to emerge. Crookes (1993) emphasizes the importance of AR as a tool that facilitates exploring socio-political aspects beyond the classroom that can directly or indirectly affect the classroom proceedings in a complex ELT world driven by ideologies.

Adoption of CDA for data collection and analysis can narrate a different story from the one already known to the public. It can, in other words, highlight the shortcomings of the current theoretical and practical knowledge held by the practitioners and directly shape ELT in Oman. Put differently, AR has the potential to get the teachers out of their comfort zones and stimulate them to question the existing ideologies and discourses embedded in the prescribed official texts and challenge their authority and legitimacy through constructing their own meanings and developing as liberal thinkers and informed decision makers. AR promotes autonomy, democracy, and empowerment and allows for challenging and changing this *status quo*, producing new knowledge, and hence transforming pedagogy (Wadsworth, 1998).

However, one wonders whether there are still more or equally powerful means of unmasking the political agendas underlying and packing ELT in Oman, which can help effective and successful adoption of CDA. The answer is "Critical" or "Emancipatory" AR. Critical or Emancipatory AR is a challenging research method and approach with a political agenda that encourages active participation and inquiry and systematic and informed action against problems and conflicts with ideological, cultural, and political roots like the ones found in the Omani ELT system.

Al-Issa (2002) found that teachers are required to follow the teacher's guide and teach for exam purposes, as exams are almost entirely based on the mandated syllabus. This not only conflicts with the policy guidelines, but also largely restricts teacher's epistemic power and contribution to producing communicatively competent students, who can effectively contribute to nationalization and modernization. Exams, as hegemonic practices almost entirely based on memorizing and copying the sacred textbooks' knowledge, have been largely the sole and dominant tool for gauging students' attainment in Oman. Achieving high marks in tests in Oman has always been a reflection of the effectiveness, success, and credibility of the system and the individuals administering it. Exams, in other words, have presented reality in a distorted

manner and pulled the wool over the people's eyes regarding the numerous existing problems, their origins, and causes. Choice of a new data collection and analysis method has the potential raise the public's awareness about exams as an unsatisfactory means of assessment through exposing the weaknesses of such system and its poor contribution to nation building. It can additionally provoke people's thinking about alternative means of assessment that require thinking beyond the narrow and mandated syllabus knowledge.

Participants and Topics

The topics selected for investigation are important and reflect the program students' awareness, knowledge, and experience about the multiple problems the Omani ELT system has been encountering over the past 44 years or so. Nevertheless, investigation of the micro-level notions is narrow and insufficient for change and transformation. A complex and expanding field like applied linguistics has adopted new critical directions in looking beyond mere classroom practices, as there are several influential agents and agencies other than students and teachers and schools. Those agents and agencies have their own discourses and ideas, which are embedded in their ideologies, and which strongly drive and shape the reasons underlying ELT problems and solutions, which can have significant implications for positive policy implementation.

Thus, teachers and students are not the only "expert" agents/informants on ELT topics in Oman. The discussion above showed that the BES introduced two new levels of authority to the Omani ELT system—senior teachers and supervisors. These two are powerful socialization agents who hold sanctioning power over teachers and safeguard policy implementation, which can influence teaching and learning for better or worse. While these two categories of agents were involved in four studies respectively (#16, #51, #58, and #69), where qualitative methods like interview, observation, and thematic analysis were employed, the analysis failed to reach a critical level. Had a critical level of analysis been adopted, a clearer picture about the discursive and ideological struggle over ELT theory and implementation within schools and beyond would have been portrayed and decisions about the selection of more topics and participants would have been reached to allow for additional theories about ELT in the Sultanate to emerge.

Therefore, and in line with these significant changes and transformations, one can argue that it is imperative that the circle of study population involved in such theses expands to include high-profile decision makers and stakeholders in the state such as Ministers, Under Secretaries, Advisors, Director Generals, Deputy Director Generals, Directors, Public and Private University Vice Chancellors, Deputy Vice Chancellors, College Deans, Assistant Deans, Centre Directors, School Principals, Teacher Educators/Trainers, and other powerful individuals. These elites construct and formulate institutional and professional policies and produce and reproduce plans and control, dominate, and enforce their implementation, and make crucial decisions that directly and indirectly impact upon the ELT context in Oman for better or worse. Such individuals can be approached and interviewed for their decisions and for describing, interpreting and explaining any policy texts sanctioned by them.

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007) call this category of people "powerful people" who are in "key positions," who "...exert control to secure what they want or can achieve... and whose decisions have significant effects on large number of people" (p. 127). Cohen et al. (2007) describe this kind of research as "researching up," which is contrary to "researching down," which includes teachers and students and is "conventional." The three authors call this "a branch of sensitive research" (p. 128), as it deals with debated and contested policy-related issues, and discuss how challenging it can be for researchers take on such a task.

Another important category of the society that has been evidently overlooked by the M.Ed. researchers is the parents. Parents are the cornerstone for modernization and development in any country. They have a central role to play in nation building and ELT policy implementation, or otherwise. They are powerful and influential agents, who, through their everyday contact with their children, control and shape their socialization in general and linguistic socialization in particular for good or bad.

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) discuss the centrality of parents in language education policy making and implementation and call it “community policy.” Research from the different parts of the Arab World and beyond (Brookes, 2001; Hussein, 1999; Kasaian & Subbakrishna, 2011; Taha, 2008; G. White, 2013) has shown and emphasized the importance of considering parents’ attitudes towards the quality of language education offered to their children.

Conclusion

I tried in this study to make a case for change in the ELT research directions at the M.Ed. ELT level at SQU. The thrust of the case focuses on providing alternative directions in research questions, methodology, and population with a critical analytical dimension that employs a qualitative content analysis methodology and considers issues at the macro-level and how they affect the micro-level. This is best achieved through asking different critical research questions to the ones already asked and examining new research methods and key agents and agencies involved directly and indirectly in the theory and practice of ELT in Oman, which has been experiencing various problems and has failed to fulfil its potential and deliver the required outcomes.

Problems and solutions pertinent to teaching an international foreign language like English should not and cannot be merely confined to and perceived through the lenses of the teachers and students, confined to the micro world of the classroom, and through focusing on quantitative research methods. This is while insufficient attention is being paid to the macro world of ELT, which is complex and governed by various agents and agencies holding variable degrees of power and control and multiple layers of ideologies. Research conducted this far at the M.Ed. in ELT level has scratched the surface and highlighted the outside story of the Omani ELT. However, the need is urgent to unearth for the inside story, what lies beneath, and what can be critically read in the different socially and politically constructed discourses and ideologies.

ELT reform has been a major concern for the Omani government. This has been evident in the efforts made and multi-millions of U.S. dollars invested so far in improving ELT, but which have yielded disappointing results this far. Postgraduate research is an integral life saver for ELT, which drives the need for ELT research at SQU to take a new direction. However, part of the discussion has revealed that what is happening at the program is a classic case of policy-practice drift. While the program aims are emphasizing critical investigation of ELT in Oman, the research directions embraced by the students and faculties have been otherwise. Part of the discussion has shown that this can be attributed to certain “elite closure” (Myers-Scotton, 1990, 1993) practices adopted by the powerful college faculty, which have different kinds of effect on their supervised students’ knowledge and beliefs.

Given these speculations, one can stress the need for a systematic inquiry to include the students and respective supervisors. This is in order to find out the genuine reasons underlying ELT research as lacking the critical characteristics discussed in this article, which can contribute to the generation of new theories and knowledge about ELT in Oman and other almost identical contexts like the five neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council Countries and very similar contexts like the different Arab countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

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Appendix

Theses Coding Manual Components

No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
1	1995	Communication Strategies for Conveying Lexical Meaning in the Written Production of Omani EFL Students at Sultan Qaboos University	College of Education SQU Students	Story Telling and Translation	3 What
2	1995	The Writing Process of Skilled and Unskilled Omani College Students of English as a Foreign Language	SQU College of Education Students	Students' Written Protocols	2 What and 1 How
3	1995	A Diagnostic Study of the Difficulties Encountered by Omani Secondary School Students in their Oral Production of English	Secondary School Students	Questionnaire and Interview	7 What
4	1995	Identifying the Competencies of Effective EFL teachers at the Preparatory School Level in Oman	Preparatory Teachers	Observation, Questionnaire and Ethnographic Narratives	3 What, 2 Yes/No, and 1 How
5	1995	Identifying the English Language Needs of Science Students in the College of Science and College of Education and Islamic Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University	SQU Students and Faculty Members	Questionnaire, Observation, and Interview	5 What
6	1996	Response to Learners' Writing in EFL at Sultan Qaboos University: A Study of Teachers' and Students' Beliefs	SQU Students and Faculty Members	Questionnaire	6 What
7	1996	Oral Questioning by Omani Teachers of English as a Foreign Language in the Muscat Preparatory and Secondary Schools	Omani Preparatory and Secondary Teachers	Observation	3 What and 2 Yes/No
8	1996	Study Skills and Habits of Omani Learners of English as a Foreign Language at Sultan Qaboos University	Omani Students	Questionnaire and Adapted Study Skills and Learning Habits Inventory	2 What and 3 Yes/No
9	1996	An Evaluation Study of the TEFL Program of the Intermediate Teacher Training Colleges (ITTC) in the Sultanate of Oman	ITTC Graduates, Teachers, and Inspectors	Questionnaire	3 What

10	1996	A Diagnostic Study of the EFL Reading Ability of Omani Secondary School Students in the Muscat Region	Omani Secondary School Students	Reading Materials and Test	6 What
11	2002	Identifying Test-Taking Strategies of Secondary School Students and their Attitudes Toward English Tests	Secondary School Students	Test, Questionnaire, and Interview	2 What and 2 Yes/No
12	2002	Investigating Vocabulary Learning Strategies of Omani Students	Omani Preparatory and Secondary Students	Questionnaire	2 What and 1 How
13	2002	EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Assessment Tools Used in the First Cycle of Omani Basic Education Schools	Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
14	2002	Washback Effect of Secondary Certificate English Examination on Teaching and Learning Processes	Third Secondary Teachers and Students	Questionnaire	2 What and 2 Yes/No
15	2002	The Effects of the Reader Response Theory on Omani Secondary School Students' Attitudes and Comprehension of Short Stories	Secondary School Students	Test and Questionnaire	2 What
16	2002	Analysis of Supervision Feedback Reports of Senior English Teachers in Basic Education Schools	Senior English Teachers	Functional and Thematic Analytic System	2 What
No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
17	2003	Language Learning Strategies of Omani Secondary School Graduates Enrolled in the First Year at Sultan Qaboos University	Third Secondary School Graduates	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
18	2003	Investigating English Language Teacher Beliefs about Language Learning	Teachers	Belief Elicitation Instrument and Interview	1 What and 1 Yes/No
19	2003	Omani EFL Students' Perceptions of Reading Difficulties	SQU Freshmen	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
20	2003	Attitudes of Omani Secondary School Students Towards Learning English	First Secondary School Students	Questionnaire	2 What
21	2003	Omani English Teachers' Perceptions of the Teacher Education Program at Sultan Qaboos University	SQU Graduate Teachers	Questionnaire	4 How
22	2003	English Teachers' Perceptions of Supervision Practices	Basic Education Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
23	2004	EFL Teachers' Tacit Beliefs about Writing Instruction in Oman	Secondary School Teachers	Observation, Self-Report Form, and Interview	2 What
24	2004	EFL Teachers' Cognition in Reading Instruction	Teachers	Reading Comprehension Test	1 What and 2 Yes/No

25	2004	EFL Teachers' Practices of Reflective Teaching in Oman	Omani Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
26	2004	Omani English Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Role of Grammar Instruction in EFL Teaching and Learning	Students and Teachers	Questionnaire	2 What and 3 Yes/No
27	2004	EFL Teacher Motivation and the Factors Influencing it in Oman	Omani Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 2 Yes/No
28	2004	Omani EFL Learners' Writing Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Abilities	Students Enrolled in The Language Centre at SQU	Writing Test	2 What and 3 Yes/No
No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
29	2006	EFL Supervisors' and Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Foreign Language Teachers	Teachers	Vignette-Based Instrument	2 What and 2 Yes/No
30	2006	Omani EFL Learners' Classroom Activity Preferences	Omani Basic Education Students	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
31	2006	In-Service Training Needs of EFL Teachers in Oman	Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
32	2006	EFL Teachers' Use of Group Work in Omani Basic Education Schools	Basic Education Teachers	Observation and Questionnaire	2 What and 1 Yes/No
33	2006	EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Cultural Aspects in Omani EFL Basic Education Textbooks	Basic Education Teachers	Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
34	2007	The Effectiveness of Pair and Group Feedback on the Writing Performance of EFL Students in Oman	Grade 11 Basic Education Students	Writing Tasks and Test	5 Yes/No and 2 How
35	2007	The Effect of Teaching EFL Online on the Achievement and Attitudes of Grade 11 Students	Grade 11 Basic Education Students	Achievement Test and Questionnaire	1 What and 2 Yes/No
36	2007	EFL Teachers' Perceived Knowledge and Actual Use of Question Types in Grade 5-12 in Omani Schools: A Case Study in Dhofar Region	Basic Education Teachers	Questionnaire and Observation	2 What, 1 Yes/No, and 1 How
37	2007	EFL Cooperating Teachers' Roles and Practices in Mentoring as Perceived by Cooperating Teachers and Student Teachers	Cooperating Teachers and Student Teachers	Questionnaire	4 What, 2 Yes/No, and 1 How
38	2008	The Effectiveness of Web-Based Extensive Reading in Developing Vocabulary and Reading Skills	Grade Nine Basic Education Cycle Two Students	Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Test and Vocabulary Knowledge Scale	1 What and 2 Yes/No

No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
39	2008	The Effect of E-Training on the Performance and Attitudes of EFL Teachers in Oman	Basic Education Cycle One Teachers	Training Program for Primary English Teachers	1 What and 2 Yes/No
40	2008	The Effects of the Self-Regulated Strategy development (SRSD) Model on the Writing Performance and Apprehension of EFL Learners in Oman	Foundation Year Students from the College of Banking and Financial Studies	Writing Test	2 What
41	2008	Teachers' Evaluation of EFL Textbooks Used in the Omani Basic Education Schools	Teachers	Checklist	1 What, 1 Yes/No, and 1 How
42	2008	The Effect of Test-Taking Strategy Instruction on Test Performance and Test Anxiety of EFL Basic Education Students in Oman	Grade Nine Basic Education Students	Test and Interview	6 Yes/No
43	2008	Strategies Used by Omani Learners to Cope with Foreign Language Learning Anxiety	Grade 10 Basic Education Students	Classroom Anxiety Scale and Learner Strategy Inventory	2 What and 2 Yes/No
44	2009	EFL Teachers' Perceptions and Use of Web-Based Activities in Teaching English	English Teachers in Omani Public General and Basic Education Schools	Questionnaire	3 What and 2 Yes/No
45	2009	Effectiveness of Vocabulary Learning Strategies-Based Instruction in Omani EFL Classes	Grade Nine Female Students	Tests, Questionnaire, and Interview	3 Yes/No
46	2009	The Effect of Spelling E-Games on 5 th Grade Learners' Spelling Performance and Attitudes	Fifth Grade Basic Education Students	Achievement Test and Questionnaire	2 What
47	2009	Effect of Metacognitive Reading Strategy on Omani Students' Reading Performance and Attitudes	Grade Nine Basic Education Students	Reading Comprehension Test	2 What
No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
48	2009	The Professional Development of the English Language Teachers at the Omani Ministry of Defence	Ministry of Defence Teachers	Interview and Questionnaire	3 What and 1 How
49	2009	The Effect of Computer Assisted Grammar Instruction on the Achievement and the Attitudes of Omani 6 th Grade EFL Learners	Grade Six Basic Education Students	Achievement Test and Questionnaire	2 What
50	2009	Effects of Using Process Writing Moodle Based for teaching Writing in the Writing Performance of Omani Students	Grade 12 Basic Education Students	Test and Questionnaire	2 What
51	2010	The Effectiveness of Supervisory Tools as Viewed by EFL Teachers and Supervisors in Oman	Basic Education EFL Teachers and Supervisors	Questionnaire	2 What and 1 Yes/No

52	2011	Effect of Collaborative Strategic Reading on Omani EFL Students' Reading Performance	Grade Seven Basic Education Students	Reading Comprehension Test	1 What
53	2011	Effect of the Story Grammar Method on Omani EFL Students' Comprehension of Narrative Texts	Grade Nine Basic Education Students	A Designed Story Grammar Reading Program and Reading Comprehension Test	1 What
54	2011	Investigating Teaching Anxiety and Teaching Self-Efficacy of Novice Omani EFL Teachers	Novice Omani Basic Education Teachers	Scale and Interview	4 What and 2 Yes/No
55	2011	The Effect of Teacher Training Program on EFL Learner's Self-Directed Learning Strategies and their Language Achievement	Post-Basic Grade 11 Basic Education Students	Self-Directed Learning Strategies Inventory, Language Achievement Test, and Interview	2 Yes/No
56	2011	The Role of Prior Knowledge in EFL Reading Comprehension: Omani Teachers' Perspectives and Classroom Strategies	Grade Six and Seven Basic Education Teachers	Questionnaire, Observation Checklist, and Interview	2 What and 1 Yes/No
57	2011	The Effect of Using Dialogic Journals in Pairs and in Groups on Improving Teachers' Reflection	Cycle Two Basic Education Teachers	Checklist	2 What and 1 Yes/No
58	2011	Assessing Reflection in EFL Supervision Feedback Conferences	Basic Education Supervisors	Observation and Interview	2 How
59	2011	Effect of Using E-Portfolios on Omani EFL Teachers' Reflection	Basic Education Omani Teachers	Self-Report, Adopted Rubric of Assessing Reflection, Wiki-Based E-Portfolios, and Interview	1 How
60	2011	Omani EFL Teachers' Books as Educative Materials: An Evaluative Analytic Study	Basic Education Teachers	Developed Content Analysis Tool and Questionnaire	2 What
61	2011	Investigating the Collaborative Professional Practices of Omani EFL Teachers and their Relation to the Quality of their Reflection	Basic Education Omani Teachers	Checklist, Teachers' Journal, and Field Notes	2 What
62	2011	Effect of Study Abroad Programs on Participants' Intercultural Communicative Competence	SQU Students	Questionnaire and Interview	3 What
63	2011	The Effect of Process Writing Workshops on Performance and Attitudes of 10 th Graders of Basic Education Schools in Oman	Grade 10 Basic Education Students	Test and Questionnaire	1 What and 4 Yes/No
64	2011	An Evaluation of Grade Eleven Basic Education Students' Performance in English Language Skills	Grade 11 Basic Education Students	Design Study	2 Yes/No and 2 How
65	2011	The Impact of Teacher Development on Groups on	Basic Education Teachers	Observation, Interview, Journal, and Field Notes	3 What

66	2011	Omani EFL Teachers' Classroom Practice The Effect of Service-Learning on the Language Performance and Attitudes Towards English of Grade 4 Omani Students	Grade Four Basic Education Students	Test, Questionnaire, and Interview	3 Yes/No, 1 What, and 1 How
No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
67	2012	Investigating EFL Omani Grade Two Learners' Ability to Produce English Phonics	Grade Two Basic Education Students and Teachers	Reading Test and Questionnaire	2 Yes/No and 1 How
68	2012	Effect of Graded Readers on Reading Performance and Motivation of Omani EFL Students	Grade 10 Basic Education Students	Extensive Reading Program and Reading Test	2 What
69	2012	Assessing Reflection in EFL Supervision Feedback Conferences	Basic Education Supervisors and Teachers	Functional and Thematic Analytic System	2 How
70	2012	Consciousness-Raising Tasks in EFL: Design and Impact	Foundation Level College Students	Test and Consciousness-Raising Tasks	3 How
71	2012	Effect of Synthetic Phonics Instruction on Early Reading Skills of Grade One Students in Oman	Grade One Basic Education Students	Test	3 Yes/No and 1 How
72	2012	EFL Learners' Oral Production through Focused and Unfocused Communication Tasks	Grade 10 Basic Education Students	Communication Tasks, Field Notes, and Interview.	2 What
73	2012	Effect of Graphic Organizers on the Writing Performance and Attitudes of Omani Grade Eight EFL Students	Grade Eight Basic Education Students	Test and Questionnaire	2 Yes/No
74	2012	The Effect of Corpus Consultation on Omani EFL Learners' Writing Performance and Attitudes at Sultan Qaboos University	SQU Language Centre Students	Test and Questionnaire	1 What and 1 Yes/No
75	2013	Investigating EFL Teachers' Perceptions, Practices, and Difficulties of Learner-Centred Approach in Oman	Basic Education Teachers	Questionnaire, Observation, and Interview	3 What
76	2013	Omani English Teachers' Use of Oral Corrective Feedback in the Basic Educational System	Basic Education Teachers and Grade Seven, Eight, Nine, 10, 11, and 12 Students	Observation, Checklist, and Questionnaire	2 What, 2 Yes/No, and 1 Which
No	Year	Thesis Title	Study Population	Data Collection Tool	Research Questions
77	2013	Pronunciation Errors in the English Sounds Produced by Grade Ten Students: An Analytical Diagnostic Study	Grade 10 Basic Education Students	Word List and Questionnaire	3 What and 3 Yes/No

78	2013	The Effect of Online Collaborative Project-Based Learning on EFL Learners' Language Performance and Attitudes	Basic Education Students	Test and Questionnaire	1 What and 4 Yes/No
79	2014	The Effect of Using Process Writing Assessment on the Writing Performance and Attitudes of Omani EFL 11 Graders	Grade 11 Basic Education Students and Teachers	Test, Questionnaire, and Interview	2 What and 4 Yes/No
80	2014	Gender Gap in Reading: The Impact of Reading Self-Efficacy Beliefs on EFL Reading Achievement	Grade Four and 10 Basic Education Students	Test and Self-Efficacy Belief Scale	6 Yes/No
81	2014	Effect of E-mail Exchange on Omani Students' EFL Writing Skills	Grade Seven Basic Education Students	Test	5 Yes/No
82	2014	The Effect of Using Process Portfolio-Based Writing Assessment on the Writing Performance and Attitudes of Omani 11 Graders	Grade 11 Basic Education Students and Teachers	Test and Interview	2 What and 2 Yes/No

Glossary of Acronyms

AR – Action Research
BES – Basic Education System
CAL – Critical Applied Linguistics
CDA – Critical Discourse Analysis
CLT – Communicative Language Teaching
ELT – English Language Teaching
LPP – Language Planning and Policy
M.Ed. – Master of Education
SQU – Sultan Qaboos University

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