

**THE CHALLENGES OF DESIGNING AND DELIVERING AN
APPROPRIATE ENGLISH AS A MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE
CURRICULUM FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN IN OMAN**

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Abstract

This study examines stakeholders' experiences of the English primary curriculum reform of grades 3 and 4 in Omani state schools. At the macro level, it examines the impetus for reform and its aims. At the micro level, it examines the challenges and opportunities teachers experienced, the quality of support and training they received from supervisors and trainers, and the views of both students and their parents.

A mixed methods design was adopted, using questionnaires, focus group interviews and one-to-one interviews. Phase 1 involved a scoping exercise in the Muscat (capital city) region through the collection of data vis-à-vis a questionnaire from primary school children (n=151) in years 3 and 4 and their parents (n=126). English teachers (n=5) were also interviewed in five schools.

In Phase 2, emerging themes from Phase 1 were explored in greater depth through a questionnaire completed by primary school children (n=210) and their parents (n=191) from the AL Dahira region. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with students (n=13) from the Muscat and AL Dahira regions. Three focus group interviews were conducted with English teachers (n=15) in three regions (Muscat, AL Sharqia South and AL Dahira regions) supplemented with semi-structured interviews with policymakers (n=2), supervisors (n=3) and trainers (n=3) from the three regions.

Although the findings indicated that progress had been achieved in introducing shared writing, reading time, vocabulary and grammar rules in grades 3 and 4 (reform), the findings also suggested that a number of challenges were identified. Teachers' views about much of the contents of the compulsory school textbook in relation to choice of topics, the development of the productive skills, lack of resources, and problems with assessment were overwhelmingly negative. The gap between policymakers and teaching communities was also observed, where the latter emphasised the fact that they were not part of curriculum development process. Furthermore, it seems that

curriculum reform was neither adequately underpinned by theoretical principles, nor supported with appropriate teacher development. Nonetheless, the study found a high level of enthusiasm for English learning amongst students and their parents.

In essence, the study established tensions between the intended, written, supported and taught curricula, which have significant implications for future curriculum development.

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Abbreviation

BA	Bachelor of Arts
BBs	Big Books
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CPH	Critical Period Hypothesis
EFL	English Foreign Language
KS2	Key Stage 2
L1	The first language
L2	The second language
MFL	Modern Foreign Language
PCK	Pedagogical Content Knowledge
PGCE	Primary Post Graduate Certificate in Education
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
TB	Teachers' Book
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This is a study of teaching and learning English as a modern foreign language (MFL) in primary state schools in Oman in the wake of a series of policy reforms. The research aimed to explore (1) the challenges in English primary curriculum from various stakeholders' perspectives (including teachers, pupils and parents); (2) trainers' and supervisors' opinions and suggestions about training and development programmes for primary English teachers; and (3) the drivers for curriculum reform in primary English. The doctoral work also aimed to consider the findings of local stakeholders in conjunction with the theoretical and pedagogical principles around which the primary curriculum design for English as an MFL should be developed.

The aims of the study were achieved by adopting a mixed methods research design carried out in two stages (Phases 1 and 2). Phase 1 involved the collection of data from primary school children (n=151) in year 3 and 4, their parents (n=126) and English teachers (n=5) from five schools in the Muscat region. Phase 2 also comprised of primary school children (n=210) in year 3 and 4, and their parents (n=191) from the AL Dahira region. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with students enrolled in year 3 and 4 (n=13) from the Muscat region and the AL Dahira region, supervisors (n = 3) and trainers (n=3) from the Muscat region, AL Sharqia South region, and the AL Dahira region. There were also three focus group interviews with English teachers (n=15) from the three regions. The focus group interview data were supplemented with open-ended, semi-structured interviews with policymakers (n=2) from the Muscat region.

The study took an exploratory approach to learn more about a phenomenon and to ask questions about how policy was being played out on the ground (Gray, 2009). This is a study of English as an MFL unlike earlier research in Oman that has focused on secondary curriculum, the focus here is exclusively on primary schools. Having identified a gap in the literature and research about English primary curriculum reform

in Oman, I wished to explore the challenges encountered and consider their implications for future curriculum development. Despite the fact that teaching of MFLs, in particular, the teaching of English as a second language, and training and developing teachers in this field had become common practice in different countries around the world, it seemed that in Oman providing teachers with the needed knowledge was not well recognised. However, aware of the issues relating to 'policy borrowing', i.e. that practices in one country are not necessarily directly transferable to another, especially when the culture is very different, I wanted to understand local perspectives before making any recommendations.

Since research about teaching MFLs in primary schools and training and continuous professional development for MFL teacher is limited in Oman, this study can make a contribution to knowledge by complementing the field of research about primary second language learning in other parts of the world. In addition, this study can be regarded as the first study that has focused on exploring children's and parents' views and suggestions about the English primary curriculum in the Oman context and also in Arabic contexts.

This chapter now provides the background information needed to understand contextual issues related to the topic under investigation. It begins with a brief history of general education in the Sultanate of Oman. Then it describes the structure of the educational system. Thereafter, it gives an overview of the history of the English curriculum in the country, followed by an explanation of assessment in state schools. The chapter then provides an overview of a specific qualification for English teachers and discusses the responsibilities of the supervisors and the trainers. The final sections return to the purpose and rationale of the study in further detail than in the introductory paragraphs, outlining the research questions, and finally, the organisation of the thesis.

1.1 General Background

1.1.1 Education in Oman: A Brief History

Oman, officially the Sultanate of Oman with Muscat as the capital city, is an Arab country on the south eastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Oman holds a strategically important position at the mouth of the Persian Gulf; the nation is bordered by the United Arab Emirates to the north-west, Saudi Arabia to the west, and Yemen to the south-west, and shares marine borders with Iran and Pakistan (Ministry of Education, 2014). Oman's area is about 309,500 square kilometres, and it is the third largest country in the Arabian peninsula (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Formal education was not common before the 1970s in Oman, with education limited to the Quran schools and mosques, where students were taught under trees or in mosques. A new era began in 1970 when Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne. Since this time, Oman has emerged as a prosperous and modern nation. Sultan Qaboos has balanced tribal, regional and ethnic divisions and improved the quality of life for his people (Oman Educational Portal, Ministry of Education, 2010). H.M Sultan Qaboos bin Said argued that 'Our stress on useful sciences emanates from our belief that it is the right springboard for acquiring knowledge, expertise and skills' the Ministry of Education (2010:4)

As is the case in other sectors of Omani society, the education system was changed radically after the accession of Sultan Qaboos bin Said. According to the Ministry of Education (2014), the total number of schools increased from 3 in 1970 to 1,043 in academic year 2012/2013, with a total of 514,667 students, and 53,195 teachers of grades 1-6 in 2012/2013.

Approximately 34,672 of these teachers were female because only female teachers teach students in grades 1 to 4. These statistics are shown in (Figure 1.1). Since 1970,

education has been funded by the government, (Ministry of Education, 2002). The education budget increased from 451,775,445 million Omani Rials in the academic year 2005/2006 to 687,971,266 million Omani Rials in the academic year 2010/2011 and reached 1,023,437,258 million in 2012/2013 (Ministry of Education, 2012). In addition, there are 406 private schools and 37 international schools in the country and they are privately funded.

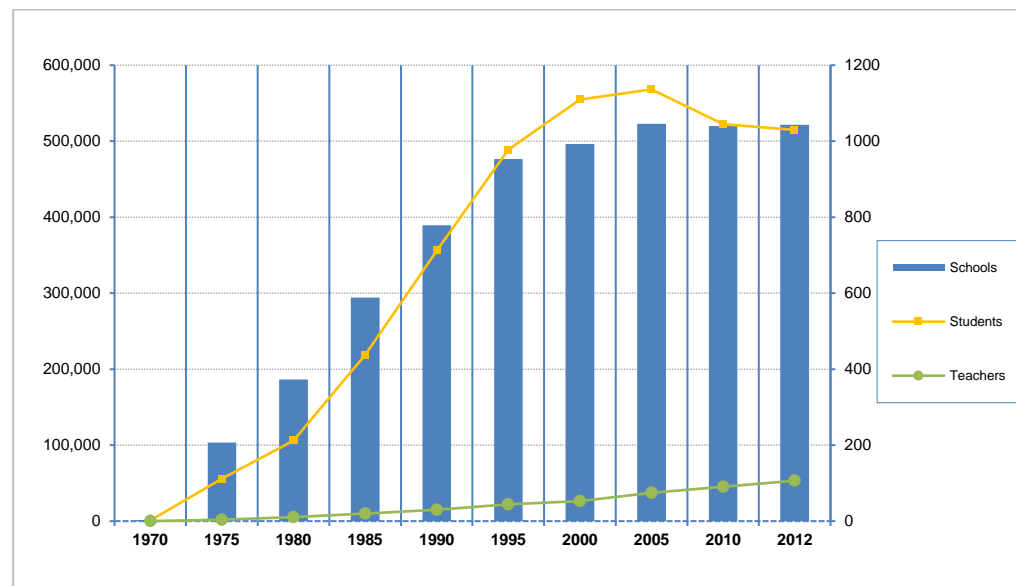


Figure 1.1: Number of Schools, Students and Teachers in Oman 1970-2012

Due to the expansion of state education, the Ministry of Higher Education has needed to pay great attention to supplying the labour market with qualified teachers, ensuring that they have the competencies and skills required to fulfil job requirements. Based on the figures, the total number of higher education institutions reached 54 in the year 2011/2012, 28 state institutes and 26 private institutes in different regions with a total of 90,994 students (Ministry of Education, 2014).

1.1.2 Structure of the Omani Education System

One of the visions for Oman's economy 2020 was to establish a diversified and dynamic globalised economy and responding to that vision 'Basic Education' reform was introduced (Ministry of Education, 2008). There are several bodies responsible for education in the Sultanate of Oman (see Table 1.1). The Ministry of Education is responsible for supervised pre-school education and for grades 1-12, which cater for children aged 6-17. Formal education is comprised of four levels: preschool education, basic education (Cycle 1 and Cycle 2), post-basic education and general education.

Table 1.1: Education Bodies in the Sultanate of Oman

Age Group/Grade	Type of Education	Type of Ministry
Cycle 1: 6-9 years, Grades 1-4 Cycle 2: 10-15 years Grades 5-10	Basic Education	Ministry of Education
Grades 11-12	Post-basic Education	Ministry of Education
Grades 1-12	General Education	Ministry of Education
Undergraduate and postgraduate	Universities, government and private colleges	Ministry of Higher Education
	Vocational education and technical training	Ministry of Manpower

Basic Education, which started in 1998/1999, comprises two cycles. Cycle 1 comprises grades 1 to 4 mixed gender classes taught by female teachers only. Students learn Islamic studies, Arabic language, English language, mathematics, social studies, physical education, arts education, music, environmental life skills, and information technology. Cycle 2 comprises grades 5–10. Teachers, as well as students, are segregated by gender and students learn all the subjects in Cycle 1. After 10 years of study, students move to the Post-Basic Education, which involves an additional two years of study. Students are divided into two main streams, Arts and Science, where

they study specialised curricula, taking into consideration their choices of optional subjects. Students sit National Exams in different subjects and, based on their results, they can apply to different fields of study both in and outside the country.

General Education consists of 12 years of public schooling. The system was prevalent before Basic Education, and it began to diminish with the expansion of mainstream Basic education. In other words, it was projected that by the end of 2010 all students in grades 1-4 would be studying under the Basic Education system (Ministry of Education, 2014).

The Ministry has sought to bring together the two systems (Basic and General Education) through the unification of curricula, teaching strategies and methods of assessment. However, the changes in the Basic education reform were accompanied by significant changes in the percentage weighting of particular subjects: grades 1-10 spend 44% more time on Arabic, 89% more time on science, 90% more time in mathematics and 122% more time on English (Ministry of Education, 2007). Apart from increased curriculum time for particular subjects, the reform included other foci:

- providing learners with opportunities for experimental learning;
- shifting away from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning;
- learning about information technology, e.g. ICT;
- preparing learners for future labour market requirements;
- enabling learners to participate successfully in the comprehensive development of Omani society (Ministry of Education, 2007).
- 'To value the diversity of the world's peoples, cultures, and ecosystems' (Ministry of Education, 2012:7).

In the English language curriculum, the reform across both cycles was based on providing learners with knowledge of problem-solving, critical thinking, and investigation. Furthermore, it included learning to use English as an international

language for communication and to reinforce topics in other subject areas (Ministry of Education, 2012).

However, because the education system in Oman is designed to prepare the learners for life and work under the new conditions created by the global economy, new language subject areas were also been developed. For example, the Sultanate started training Omani English teachers to teach German and French. In 2012/2013, they started with German in five post-basic state schools in the Muscat region and South Batinah. In the following year, the country initiated the teaching of the French language in four schools, two in the Muscat region and the other two in South Batinah. These two languages are taught as optional subjects for grades 11-12 for four lessons a week. However, the teaching of English has been taking place for much longer.

1.2 History of the English Curriculum in Oman

The philosophy of teaching English in Oman reflects an important feature of the country. For example, after 1970, Oman developed business relationships with many non-English countries in the world such as Turkey, Sweden, Germany, Cyprus, France, Italy, Greece, Belgium, Austria, Portugal, and Russia, and English was used as a common language to communicate with these countries and other non-English-speaking areas (Al-Jadidi, 2009). It can be argued that this example was the initial reason behind the decision to introduce English language studies in the country. Oman also has other goals that guided the introduction of English into the curriculum. For example, there are two goals in the introduction of the English curriculum: first, '*globalisation*', because the Sultanate of Oman was facing the challenge of preparing its nation for life and to enter a global workforce created by the modern global economy; therefore, it was important to provide them with the relevant skills and languages. 'The government recognises that facility in English is important in the new global economy. The global language for Science and Technology is also English as

are the rapidly expanding international computerised databases and telecommunications networks, which are becoming an increasingly important part of the academic and business life' (Ministry of Education, 1995: A5-1). Second, '*Omanisation*', to educate Omani nationals in order to decrease dependency on foreign labour (Ministry of Education, 2006).

1.2.1 Reforming the English Curriculum

Over the past 42 years, three English educational reforms were implemented under the headings of 'General Education' in the 1970s 'Basic Education' in 1998 and the 'Integrated Curriculum' in 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2011). General Education involved a traditional teacher-centred approach and English was taught to children from grade 4 onwards. This was changed when Basic Education was introduced in state schools, and English started to be taught from grade 1.

The rationale for teaching English from grade 1 was to develop a linguistic foundation and positive attitudes towards language learning in the later stages of students' schooling (Ministry of Education, 1999). The English reform has been developed to support the learners in different areas: *learning skills and attitudes*, where learners can work independently and co-operatively and transfer thinking skills from the mother tongue to English; *cross-curricular links*, where learners learn information reinforcing knowledge and concept development in other curriculum areas, e.g. numbers, classifying animals, telling cumulative stories with predictable consequences; *life skills*, where learners learn about other children's languages and skills; and *gender*, where the activities are designed to encourage girls and boys to work together and to learn from one another (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Basic Education aimed to develop learners' Islamic values and to interact with the world as well to provide equal educational opportunities for all (Ministry of Education, 2017). Furthermore, it was designed to develop a positive attitude to language learning

through interesting materials (e.g. songs and games), and improve students' skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Teaching and learning were to be enhanced through the use of technology with computers, TV, and audio recordings utilised for listening to songs and stories by native English Language speakers (Ministry of Education, 2010). Students have seven periods per week; each period is 40 minutes. This reform was developed with support from international consultants (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012).

A further dimension of Basic Education was the 'Integrated Curriculum'. The Integrated Curriculum was developed as a part of Basic Education for the Cycle 1 level with the aim of introducing the learning of Mathematics and Science through English. This reform was first introduced in the 2006/2007 academic year in four schools in the Muscat region. By 2010/2011 there were 42 schools in different regions in the Sultanate using the Integrated Curriculum.

The rationale for this reform was as presented in the English Language Curriculum Framework, Grades 1-4, its aims were:

- 1) 'To improve the balance between the four skills,
- 2) to change the methodology in reading skills to include phonics, and shared reading (involves the children sitting on a mat around the teacher while she is reading a story),
- 3) to include shared writing (the teacher and children write together modelling sentence structure and grammatical structures),
- 4) to improve integration between topics and activities to support contextualisation of learning'.

(Ministry of Education, 2009: 3)

In this curriculum, students have two English lessons every day (up to 350 minutes a week). However, by 2011/2012 this curriculum was abolished because many teachers from integrated curriculum schools complained to the Minister of Education about an

overloaded curriculum as they were experiencing difficulties teaching Science and Mathematics using English. Therefore, the Minister cancelled it and asked all primary schools in the country to use the English books designed for the Basic Curriculum.

1.2.1.1 Curriculum Reform and Curriculum Regulation

The curricular regulation in Oman is centralised and what is taught in all state schools of the country is prescribed. In Omani state schools, teaching and curriculum content depends on the use of the textbooks which are complemented by detailed teachers' books. The latter provide prescriptive teaching procedures and strategies for individual lessons. These are written by curriculum officers and thus stipulate the curriculum content in Omani schools. However, although the curriculum officers' staff have been employed, for the most part, from the teaching profession, they have had no training for re-writing and developing textbooks. As noted by the Ministry of Education (2012), the staff are neither trained in nor familiar with curriculum development. Textbooks are provided by the Ministry of Education, a teachers' book for every single teacher and a class book and skills book for each student. In addition, schools are provided with materials such as CDs (including songs and rhymes), and class resource pack (flashcards, word cards, activity cards, a stapler, counters and dice).

During 2010 and 2011, the course books for grades 3 and 4 were rewritten. The curriculum department did not revert entirely to the textbook style for Basic Education, as the Director-General of the General Directorate of Curriculum and the Manager of the Cycle 1 Program Department agreed that there were many positive aspects in the Integrated Curriculum such as the introduction of phonics, spelling, grammar rules and shared and guided writing. At the end of 2011, the curriculum department asked the teachers for their feedback about the recent books for grades 3 and 4. Unfortunately, both students and the teachers found difficulties with these new books. The students in grades 1 and 2 did not have enough support for their writing and reading skills; therefore, they were not able to cope with the course books for grades 3 and 4.

Teachers still face problems with an overloaded curriculum, pedagogy and assessment process. This means that there is still a problem that is yet to be addressed.

1.3 The Assessment System in the English Primary Curriculum

In the 'General Education' system, the common practice had been to measure students' learning by means of examination only. The examination had a tendency to focus on testing just how well students memorised the information (Ministry of Education, 2007). In the 'Basic Education', on the other hand, teachers use *continuous assessment*, which identifies strengths and weaknesses in students' performance and how effective the teaching has been. Teachers can assess their students in different ways, such as oral work, projects, reports, quizzes, short tests, examinations, homework, portfolios, self-assessment and practical performance (Ministry of Education, 2011). Teachers are also encouraged to use *formative assessment*, which allows them to update their students about where they are in their learning.

At the early stage grades, assessment in the English language learning is based mainly on the teachers' daily observation (record-keeping and reporting) and the children's own self-evaluation. Teachers are provided with a clear statement of what should be learned at each level in the teaching programme (Ministry of Education, 1999). In grades 1 and 2, children look back over their work unit and discuss what they found easy or difficult, what they liked or disliked, and record their impressions through a simple colouring task. In grades 3 and 4, students are given statements to reflect upon their own strengths or weaknesses related to the skills and concepts learned in the unit. The statements focus on the specific objectives of each unit and encourage the children to think about the extent to which they feel they have reached those objectives (Ministry of Education, 2010) and teachers can use more formal class tests with grade

4. Parents are informed about their child's progress through both verbal and written descriptive reports. These written reports are issued three times during the year and then a final one is issued at the end of the school year.

Although teachers are preparing the short test, the researcher witnessed some of the problems related to these tests. For example, they were not designed according to the curriculum goals and outcomes. Additionally, most of the time the test only assesses two skills, writing and reading. The students' actual performance was not assessed, and the test did not help children master any particular skills, and so is not a valid assessment because it does not test what it sets out to test. The reason for this is, it seems because teachers lack guidance and support. Al-Jardani (2012) found that in the English teaching context (grades 1-12), there is a need to develop a public framework for curriculum assessment to help teachers, to know what they are expected to do and what methods to use to check what is being covered.

1.4 Teachers and Their Qualifications and Training in Oman

In the 1970s and 1980s, the government allowed many teachers with low qualifications to enter the teaching system because it was necessary to expand access to education as quickly as possible (Ministry of Education, 2006). For example, in the early 70s, most Omani teachers of all subjects for grades 1-12 were 'preparatory education' graduates (AL Nabhani, 2007). In other words, 50% of the teachers held qualifications of a lower level than the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). It is important to state that, there were other categories of teachers in state schools, those who were Diploma holders, a higher level than GCSE and a lower level than GCSE (AL-Rabiey, 2004). In 1986/87, the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) received its first cohort of students studying to be teachers in different subject areas. These students were able to qualify as teachers at degree level with a Bachelor of Arts. Diploma holders of English teachers could upgrade their qualifications in cooperation with the

University of Leeds in the UK. The Ministry of Education launched a major initiative that made it possible for Omani English teachers to upgrade their diploma qualification to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This project was for teachers at all levels, but mostly primary teachers of Cycle 1. It was a three-year part-time programme taught at regional centres in Oman and at the University of Leeds. The programme aimed to equip 1,060 teachers with an understanding of the latest trends in education and to use the English language proficiently in teaching (Ministry of Education, 2011).

1.4.1 Pre-service Training

There are different institutes that offer pre-service training for all subjects, for example, the Faculty of Education in the SQU, teacher colleges, a number of private universities in Oman and some institutes outside Oman (Ministry of Education, 2006). This involves practical teaching and observing classes in schools. Although the general goals for teaching practice in initial teacher education are to provide many opportunities for student teachers to spend time in classrooms under the supervision of an experienced mentor and apply their learning of theory in the context of a real classroom (Al-Rabiey, 2004), it was found that they were gaining few teaching experiences through practical teaching and observation (Ministry of Education, 2013). For example, the Ministry of Education (2006) stated that newly qualified teachers admit that they need additional training to help prepare them for their work in the classroom. Therefore, it was agreed that teaching practice time in classrooms should be increased by the Ministry of Education, SQU and the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2006).

1.4.2 Basic Education and In-service Training

The most common strategy of implementing in-service training in Oman is by using 'a cascade model' that started in 1997. This involves identifying trainers located in all regions of Oman, training them centrally at the Ministry and then instructing them to go back to their region and repeat the training programme with the teachers (Ministry of Education, 2007). The Ministry of Education (2006) stated that there are two advantages of a cascade organisational model: it allows large numbers of staff to be trained and allows for the efficient use of resources. In light of developments in the educational system, and with regard to Basic Education, training was given great importance. The Basic Education programme included a fundamental reform of the curricula, teaching and learning methodologies, and in order to be effective in implementing this reform, it was important to give teachers appropriate training (Al Hinai, 2008). The Ministry offered training programmes in the Muscat region and 11 centres in the various regions. In addition, it opened three mini training centres in Wilayat Doqum, Wilayat Thamrit, and Wilayat Samail, to ensure that all the teachers around the Sultanate had the opportunity to undertake necessary professional development.

The English Language Curriculum Department at the Ministry of Education organises different in-service teacher training activities in these centres, such as short workshops that last for 1-3 days and long courses such as Cycle 1, Cycle 2 and post-basic programmes. This course aims to equip teachers with pedagogy knowledge, e.g. student-centred approach, classroom management, skills and strategies to understand and implement the new curriculum reform. This course is offered to some teachers before they begin teaching the new, reformed curriculum, and it is offered as on-going support for others (Ministry of Education, 2006).

In addition to the above courses, in 2001, the Ministry of Education started to train English teachers to be senior English teachers (SETs). This means that, in each state

school, there is a senior teacher for each subject in addition to English. The SETs work alongside individual teachers and students and, if a teacher faces difficulties with her teaching, the SET should contact the school supervisor for support. In other words, SETs are responsible for mentoring teachers, supervising and evaluating their work.

SETs have to attend a course that lasts for 18 days, where they are trained about their role. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has adopted 'school-based teacher training' that encourages schools to become training units. This programme is carried out with school principals, assistant principals, SET teachers and supervisors. It aims to train teachers to conduct training workshops and work together to discuss, reflect on and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom. The training also covers issues such as the development of thinking skills, research methodology, and report writing (Ministry of Education, 2006, 2014).

In addition to this provision, The British Council is another educational organisation that offers a professional development programme for English teachers. It arranges workshops on a regular basis, which focus on different educational issues, methods and approaches. Finally, The SQU hosts an annual 'English Language Teaching Conference' and various experts from all over the world are often invited to the conference to discuss issues of mutual concern in education.

1.5 The Role of the Supervisors and Trainers

During the 1970s, the Ministry of Education trained a number of teachers to become supervisors (previously known as inspectors). These supervisors visited various schools throughout the Sultanate on a regular basis and reported their observations to the central authority in the Ministry of Education. In recognition of their role, they were given the opportunity to upgrade their qualifications. By the end of 2005, 238

supervisors had been awarded a Diploma in Educational Supervision (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Supervisors have various responsibilities, such as:

- Observing and discussing lessons with teachers,
- Following-up teachers' performance and checking teachers' remedial and enrichment plans,
- Participating in following-up the supply of the schools' needs in terms of books, teaching materials and other aspects,
- Providing on-going guidance and support to the teachers,
- Participating in the 'school-based teacher training' process discussed earlier,
- Following-up cascading of training in the schools,
- Supervising the implementation plans for the curricula,
- Providing the senior supervisor with a clear image of the strengths and areas for development in the supervised schools,
- Discussing teachers' performance with a senior English teacher (SET),
- Setting up professional plans with the SET based on the teacher's needs,
- Contributing with other supervisors or SETs in conducting action research.

It is important to note here that there is no difference between the SET's role and the supervisors' role in relation to supervising teachers and attending classes.

On the other hand, trainers in Oman have the responsibility for running various training courses. They are prepared for a vast range of responsibilities by attending a course conducted by the Ministry of Education. They have also been given the opportunity to continue their postgraduate studies at higher education institutes in and outside the country. Their roles are to conduct methodology courses, English language courses, research courses; design and expand training and development programmes based on the teachers' needs; manage the delivery of training, evaluate training and

development programmes; put into practice the training plans for the whole region; and design and expand training and visit teachers in their schools.

Trainers also play an important role in supporting the implementation of the new reform. As discussed earlier, trainers are trained centrally at the Ministry of Education in Muscat region via a three-day orientation programme (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012) and then they go back to their regions to replicate the training programme with all teachers and supervisors. They prepare teachers before they begin teaching the new reform, and offer on-going support. They also might decide on their main training priorities according to teachers' needs in that region.

1.6 Summing Up

Throughout the last 47 years, the Ministry of Education has enthusiastically cooperated with regional and international organisations to improve the education system in the country, but there are still some challenges. In spite of the introduction of English into the curriculum for children from an early age and the seemingly superior qualifications and training of their teachers, students' performance in English has not improved. For example, Sergon (2011) reports that a large majority of students who join the university in Oman are forced to attend 1-3 semesters of intensive English classes before the start of functional credit courses. He conducted a study to investigate why, after 12 years of learning English, Omani students still struggle. In his findings, he concluded that there were problems with teachers and the curriculum content. Teachers did not have enough training and also suffered from a lack of encouragement from the community and parents, and had heavy workloads. Furthermore, they were not consulted when the curriculum was designed. As Sergon highlighted, the curriculum was deemed inappropriate since it 'lacked a sense of continuity of skill level and that it often entirely misjudged the students' English level' (p. 20).

1.7 Purpose and Rationale of the Study

I am interested in the topic of this study for a number of reasons. Before outlining them, I think that a personal profile of my experience with teaching and the curriculum will be helpful to the reader in understanding the underpinnings of my intentions.

I worked as an English teacher from 1993 to 2003 and as a senior teacher from 2003 to 2010. In 2010, I moved to the curriculum department to work as a curriculum officer. In our department, we were asked to work on a new textbook for grade 3 by looking at the advantages of the IC curriculum because it was a recent book and arguably, more 'pedagogically' informed. A group of teachers, supervisors, trainers and a curriculum officer started work on this. At the end of the year, our department asked for teachers' feedback about the book. Unfortunately, the latest reform had produced some challenges for both teachers and students. Teachers faced problems with pedagogy issues and problems with lack of continuity between grades 1-4 and time. On the other hand, grade 3 and 4 students were less prepared in early years (grades 1-2), which made it difficult for them to cope with this book. During the 2011 academic year, I worked with a group of teachers, senior English teachers and supervisors to re-write the grade 4 English books. This book was much better balanced than the grade 3 but I believe, still presented significant challenges. Given that the textbook is a central vehicle for curriculum implementation, it is essential that it is improved in the future.

Throughout 1992 to 2012, working as an English teacher in primary schools and a curriculum officer in the curriculum department, I witnessed some of the problems related to English teaching with the textbooks first-hand. It is my concern that the problems with learning English were not only related to the textbooks but that there were also some critical issues related to curriculum content, teacher training and the curriculum officers, as neither I nor the previous curriculum officers have had any training for re-writing and developing the textbooks.

Having explained my personal involvement and experience in the area, I will now outline the reasons why I decided to research this study. Firstly, I wanted to explore the challenges in the English primary curriculum to enhance my understanding of the principles of a good curriculum so that I could better design a curriculum for Omani children. I needed to look at theoretical and practical curriculum issues to know about what a curriculum is and what researchers say about primary curriculum development of foreign language learning for primary-aged children. Secondly, the Ministry of Education will make future changes in the curriculum and this will be carried out by Curriculum officers. Curriculum officers, however, are not trained to design the curriculum. Regrettably, though, there are no Ministry guidelines on how to write a curriculum. In my role as a curriculum officer, one of my responsibilities is to modify and design a new curriculum. However, I have come to realise that it is difficult for me to make appropriate choices in this matter without understanding what is needed in curriculum development. Thirdly, there has been no prior research conducted in this area. Finally, studying for a PhD degree was a dream and I waited for almost eight years for it to happen and really I was tired of waiting to be released from my job due to a shortage of employees, but finally, this dream came true.

1.8 Research Questions

This study seeks to investigate the present problems with the English primary curriculum reform in Oman from a range of stakeholders' perspectives (teachers, parents, students, supervisors, trainers and government officers); therefore, it is centred around four principal research questions:

1. What are the theoretical principles that need to be taken into account when modifying or designing the English curriculum for primary-aged children?
2. What are the key considerations of Omani policymakers in designing the English as a modern foreign language curriculum?

3. A. What opportunities and challenges did the teachers experience in the recent curriculum reform?
3. B. What do the trainers and supervisors think should be considered in the development and delivery of the English curriculum?
4. What are the perspectives of students and parents with regard to learning English as a modern foreign language?

1.9 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into six chapters. This chapter (Chapter 1) provided an overview of the focus and intent of this study. It started with the background and context of this inquiry, followed by the purpose and rationals of the study and the research questions.

Chapter 2 presents a literature review and it is divided into three sections: 2.1 deals with modern foreign language education for primary school children; 2.2 deals with teacher training and development issues; whilst 2.3 looks at curriculum reform and development.

Chapter 3 provides a justification for the methodological approach and methods adopted. It first presents the research questions and then identifies my ontological position. In the following section, it explores the research design and methods, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a justification of the trustworthiness of the research.

Chapter 4 contains the findings and analysis of these. There are four main sections in this chapter. Section 4.1 deals with the second major research question concerning policy at the macro level, 4.2 and 4.3 deal with a third (A and B) major research

questions pertaining to micro-level issues, whilst 4.4 addresses the fourth research question that related to children and their parents. Research Question 1 is addressed in an integrated manner within each of these four sections.

Chapter 5 draws together the issues highlighted by the results of the Primary data collection and the literature review and brings them together to theorise the challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman. Inspired by Gvirtz and Beech (2004) and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) the researcher has developed the 'Balancing Act' model. Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead's conceptual framework has proved invaluable in analysing the layers of reform and related weaknesses identified in the data.

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter in which I reflect on my doctoral learning journey. It highlights how undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience and draws attention to what I have gained and learned. The aims of the study are also reviewed. It concludes with a number of limitations, some recommendations for policymakers and curriculum designers, in addition to proposals for training programmes for future curriculum development in Oman.

CHAPTER 2: The Literature Review

This chapter examines the nature of introducing and teaching of modern foreign languages (MFL) in the primary school, as it has become a common practice in different countries over the world. It then explores and discusses different aspects and forms of teachers' knowledge, skills, professional development programmes, curriculum reform and development and the existing literature on the topics.

2.1 Modern Foreign Language (MFL) Education for Primary School Children

Right from the beginning, when the new English language curriculum (Basic Education) was introduced in the Sultanate there has been a significant willingness to provide young Omanis with skills and knowledge towards MFL education from an early age.

In this section, the researcher will discuss the advantages of an early start supported by some studies. Then the researcher will provide an overview of the principles for designing an MFL curriculum for primary school aged children. This is followed by teaching, learning and assessment of the second language. This section also lays the foundation for answering the first research question:

What are the theoretical principles that need to be taken into account when modifying or designing the English curriculum for primary-aged children?

2.1.1 The Age Issue

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) proposed by Lenneberg (1967), asserts that in the period before puberty children are much more capable of learning a new language. In other words, the first few years of life constitutes the time during which language progresses readily and after the age of 5, the top end of the critical period (Krashen, 1973). According to Marinova-Todd, Marshall and Snow (2000), the critical period for language acquisition is the period of time in which it is relatively easy to learn the language and in which there is a high degree of success. Once this period has expired, the learner is less likely to achieve their capacity in the target language.

‘The younger the better’ (Jones and Coffey, 2013) is the subject of a long-standing debate in linguistics and language acquisition all over the world where the ability to acquire language is biologically linked to ageing. Although there is a small amount of disagreement among researchers about age-related issues to learn a foreign language (Driscoll and Frost, 1999; Field, 2000; Kirsch, 2008; Maynard, 2012), the idea that an early introduction of a second language leads to a higher level of language proficiency seems to be widely accepted (Pufahl, Rhodes and Christian, 2000; Bekleyen, 2011). The growing interest in teaching an MFL in primary schooling has extended in both England and Scotland (Tierney and Gallastegi, 2005), and has rapidly increased around the world (Driscoll and Frost, 1999; Cenoz, 2003; Pachler, Evans and Lawes, 2007; Jones and Coffey, 2013). Recent researchers have drawn attention to the advantages of MFL at the primary level.

Jones and Coffey (2013) in their discussion of the Key Stage 2 (KS2) Framework in England, for pupils aged between 7 and 11, draw attention to a number of areas that were introduced in the Framework about advantages of the early start (a) enjoyment of language, (b) mutual reinforcement of first language development and (c) international awareness and enhanced understanding. According to Sharpe (2001), MFL at the primary level enriches the learners’ experience of understanding the real

world and provides them with the required skills and knowledge that will continue later in life. Tierney and Gallastegi (2005) and Maynard (2012) argue that learning a language at an early age can be a smooth shift from primary to secondary level.

2.1.2 Empirical Studies on the Benefits of Learning an MFL at Primary School

Numerous studies have been undertaken in an attempt to identify the advantages of an early start to language learning. Researchers have differed in their focus to explore early MFL learning. For example, some studies sought to outline some advantages of an early start to language learning in terms of linguistic achievements (pronunciation and intonation), whilst others pointed to the positive attitudes and motivation towards language learning. In terms of linguistics, Domínguez and Pessoa (2005) compared sixth-grade students who had been learning Spanish since kindergarten with students who had Spanish for only a year. They found that early learners performed better in listening, speaking, and oral skills. Furthermore, with regard to literacy skills, the early learners were able to write more and used more sophisticated language structures compared to new students.

A related area of research has been dealt with by Harris and O'Leary (2009) who were approached by the Irish Government Department of Education and Science to evaluate a pilot project (teaching of modern languages in primary schools), which was launched in 1998. According to their findings, the majority of children displayed improvements progress in developing listening skills and initial competence in spoken communication. Tierney and Gallastegi (2005) and Hood and Tobutt (2009) argue that young learners are good at picking up and producing tone and sounds. Similar ideas have been stated by Giota (1995) pointing out that children enjoy testing out and can easily experiment with the unknown language and sounds.

In terms of attitude, Driscoll and Frost (1999), Field (2000) and Kirsch (2008) emphasise the fact that an early start has a positive effect. Sharpe (2001) argues that primary MFL learners are much less embarrassed and reticent in front of their peers when they are trying to duplicate the tricky sounds of the MFL. In an MFL learning context, among year 6 (aged 9-10) and year 7 (aged 10-11) learners, Tierney and Gallastegi (2005) found that in addition to the positive attitudes towards language learning, girls were more positive in learning MFL than boys. The gender differences issue is also highlighted by Nikula (2005), Mori and Gobel (2006) and Harris and O'Leary (2009).

Indeed, according to MFL, mainly in secondary schools, boys respond better if teaching and learning deals with: clear demonstration, positive and quick feedback, dynamic and fun teaching, and knowing where they are going during the exercise (Jones and Coffey, 2006). It is also noticed in this study that teachers thought that, in MFL classrooms, boys were more interested in physical activities.

Other studies have found that teaching modern languages in primary schools had a positive impact, not only from the point of view of the students but also teachers, principals and parents (Harris and O'Leary, 2009). Although there have been a few studies (e.g. Gardner, 1985) connecting parental role in MFL with their child's progress, there is some evidence of positive effects of parental involvement in students' MFL learning as noted by some researchers (see e.g. Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, and Miller-Johnson, 2000; Jones, 2009; Unal and Unal, 2014).

Jones' (2009) study in two secondary schools found that girls' parents were more supportive of MFL than were the boys' parents. He also found that students from the poor socio-economic background were not supported by their parents and receive less help at home with MFL homework. From Jones's study, we can understand that there were different factors that influenced attitudes: gender and socio-economic background. From his findings also we can argue that parents were playing a positive

role in encouraging their daughters and this can encourage the girls to have positive attitudes towards MFL.

In addition to a parental role in MFL, it is important to acknowledge that the teacher's role can also encourage the students to have positive attitudes towards MFL. Sharp (2001), for example, in his book about modern foreign languages in the primary school, mentioned how teacher-student relationships can support students to communicate and not be resistant to the subject. Similarly, Driscoll and Frost (1999) argued how this social relationship tends to emphasise the quality of learning in the MFL and fosters a positive attitude. It is important to acknowledge that teachers' relationship with the students is based on various types of interactions that can reinforce the positive attitudes in the language classroom context. For example, this includes supporting, guiding and scaffolding. Studies on collaborative interaction in language learning classrooms has drawn on Vygotsky's (1980) notions of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), that played an important role in facilitating foreign language learners' language learning processes. ZPD has been defined as: 'the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Vygotsky, 1980: 86). More specifically, when a student is in the ZPD for a particular task, providing the suitable model and assistance will help the student succeed in the task. Provided this kind of scaffolding at the right moments, particularly in the MFL classroom can help students to be able to achieve tasks that would otherwise be too difficult for them.

For the purposes of this study, scaffolding is an important factor by which students create opportunities for social relationships. While the MFL teacher-student relationship was not examined previously, it is interesting to note that in this study this relationship was strong, suggesting that such a relationship is more likely to have a positive influence on students' positive attitudes and motivation in English classrooms. Tierney and Gallastegi (2005) has nevertheless discovered that a lot of motivation in both groups of learners was based on intrinsic motivation through the fun of classroom

activities. It is argued that if attitudes are positive, learners will be further motivated to learn languages (Tierney and Gallastegi, 2005). According to Dörnyei (1998:177) 'Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language [L2] and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation, to some extent'.

Gardner (1985) was the first one who placed more stress on the area of motivation. Gardner distinguished between two types of motivation: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. The former refers to the desire to interact with the speakers of that community, e.g. social reasons, whereas the latter relates to personal individualities, e.g. the wish to get a good job. However, Gardner's approach received some criticism, as it is not sufficiently rooted in the classroom situation (Dörnyei, 1994).

As Dörnyei points out, 'Gardner's motivation construct does not include detail on cognitive aspects of motivation to learn' (Dörnyei, 1994:273). Dörnyei was extremely influenced by Gardner's theory, but he proposed a more general framework of L2 learning, motivation, categorised into three main dimensions, the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level (Dörnyei, 1994, 1998). Integrative and instrumental motivation came under the language level. The learner level refers to the need for accomplishment and self-possession. The latter is the 'most elaborate part of the framework which is associated with situation-specific motives rooted in various aspects of language learning in a classroom setting' (Dörnyei, 1998:125). Under this level, there are three aspects: *course specific motivation* (teaching resources, procedures and learning tasks); *teacher specific motivational components* (the teacher's behaviour, personality and teaching style and learners' wish to please the teacher); and finally, *group-specific motivational components* (the group dynamics of the learner group). According to Dörnyei (1994), the learning situation level is made up of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic is the motivation to engage in a behaviour which arises from within the individual because it is personally rewarding for example

because it is enjoyable (Noels, et al., 2000), whereas extrinsic motivation refers to actions done to meet reward and needed requirements.

With regard to the context of second language learning, Noels, Clément and Pelletier (2001) argue that motivation occurs when the student has goals, either intrinsic or extrinsic to learn the language. Without a target of any kind, the learner has a small reason to engage in language learning and may be expected to finish the implementation of this activity as soon as possible. More recently, Theodotou (2014) addresses how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence students' learning. He found that most studies support the argument that the rewards (extrinsic motivation) have a negative effect on the intrinsic motivation of students to learn; however, in some cases, the rewards can be verbal that contribute positively toward the attitude of learning. According to him, rewards may not be the essential problem, but the way in which they are used may have adverse effects on the willingness of students to learn.

Different studies agree that learners may lose their intrinsic curiosity in an activity if it is done to meet extrinsic requirements (Dornyei, 1994). In Oman, Sergon (2011) found out that Omani secondary learners did not find the school materials to be attractive and the focus was on scores and on finishing the course book. This finding supports Theodotou's (2014) argument about the negative effect of extrinsic motivation on the intrinsic motivation of students to learn. It might be argued that the use of accurate and suitable rewards focusing on the learning process rather than the product will promote motivational skills (Carlton and Winsler, 1998).

Theodotou (2014) points out that it is important to research intrinsic and extrinsic motivational theory and learning at an early age because he believes that early years' settings have a major impact on the academic performance of children in the future. This is also confirmed by Nikolov (2009), who in an eight-year study, investigated Hungarian children's foreign language learning motivation, (involving 45 children between the ages of 6 and 14 with questionnaires which consisted of open questions) and who established the significance of positive attitudes to the learning context

activities and tasks (intrinsic motivation). She also identifies Learning Situation Level in Dornyei's (1994) model as an important factor in her findings.

Investigating young learners of MFL, Wu's (2003) study also highlights the intrinsic motivation. Classroom observation was conducted to obtain data on the instructional practice and learning process in both an experimental group and a control group. Wu found a positive impact deriving from a predictable learning environment, challenging tasks, instructional support, and assessment that emphasised self-improvement all supported children's intrinsic motivation. The above findings suggest that young learners are most motivated by intrinsic factors compared to the other motivations.

Past research related to intrinsic motivation (e.g. Self-determination Theory) by Deci and Ryan (1985) has shown that learners' views of their autonomy 'is seen as a prerequisite for any behaviour to be intrinsically rewarding' (Dörnyei, 1994:276). Nikolov (1999:53) notes that 'The development of self-confidence also seems to play a major role and external rewards slowly lose some of their attractiveness'.

Nonetheless, the nature of primary motivation is complex and it a combination of integrative and instrumental orientations (Yan, 2006). To be more clear about what children do enjoy about MFL, Hood and Tobutt (2009) argued that as MFL learning is associated with fun, it is important to know how fun can emerge. According to them, there are a range of approaches, these include active teaching and learning, exciting materials, contacts with speakers of the target language and games that involve competitions and collaboration. They believed that for many children fun could emerge if classroom activities were associated with students' own 'maturity level' (ibid: 20).

The above arguments highlight that there are certain factors in relation to MFL motivation such as integrative, instrumental, intrinsic, extrinsic, self-determination, and external factors such as age and gender. Despite the fact that young learners of MFL are intrinsically motivated, it is also true that 'Instrumental motives emerge, but they are balanced by classroom-related motives even at the age of 14' (Nikolov, 1999:54).

2.1.3 Principles for Designing an MFL Curriculum for Primary School Aged Children

Bolster et al. (2004:35) have argued that 'If foreign language teaching is to be coherent across phases, a number of fairly complex considerations need to be borne in mind'. According to them, these include the goals and aims of MFL learning and the suitable pedagogical methods. In this section, principles for teaching MFL, e.g. content, relevance of an MFL, language resources, child-centred approaches, time, culture, developing linguistic skills, teaching vocabulary and grammar and assessment will be presented.

- **Content:** Driscoll and Frost (1999:116) argued that teachers can teach MFL by 'incidental language use' where it is used naturally as part of the life of the classroom and 'specific teaching' which needs to be planned. Incidental language is where teachers teach children greetings, routines, examples of classroom routines and politesse: a request or a need to thank. Kirsch (2008) gave good reasons for listening to MFL through classroom instructions: it introduces learners to the words, pronunciation and intonation of the MFL, shows comprehensible input, supports learners in making sense of the meaning of the conversation, develops speaking skills, and helps learners to memorise words and increases their confidence. Specific teaching is where teachers use directions, numbers, nouns and phrases taught through games and songs. However, Hood and Tobutt (2009) suggested that 'the problem with [the latter] is that it appears to learners as mostly either simply learning something for its own sake (for example, a list of words) or as a relatively trivial content, unless a visit is imminent, and they can see an immediate real purpose' (p. 27). They believe that to use a language, learners need to know some language and how it works as a system. In spite of this divergence of views, there is general consensus within the literature that the content of a foreign language curriculum for primary school children should relate to children's experiences (Sharpe, 2001; Jones and Coffey, 2006). It is, therefore,

important to introduce both incidental language and specific teaching content, which are ways of real language use and can reinforce learning of MFL.

- **Relevance:** As Maynard (2012) points out that, children learn better if they know the purpose for their learning. According to her, in order to help children to gain a real sense of the relevance of an MFL, teachers should give children opportunities to use the language. She believes that 'communication' is a need to enhance the oracy skills, speaking and listening, which is considered an important element in language learning. Sharpe (2001) points out that pair and group work are good examples of real communication that support learning in MFL. Hood and Tobutt (2009) believed that MFL learning should be relevant to students' social life and interest, and they suggested that a combination of language, rhythm and physical activities can be fun and interesting.

Maynard (2012) also suggests getting children out of school on a trip or visit which can be beneficial to cover different areas of the curriculum (e.g. history of the place visited, geographical features, and art). This could be categorised within what other writers refer to, for example, Sharpe (2001) refers to 'integrating MFL into the whole curriculum', or Kirsch (2008) refers to as 'cross curricular links'. It is where the MFL is applied in all other curriculum areas (Tierney and Gallastegi, 2005). However, it must be realised that this form of integrating does not mean to use the medium of the MFL in the main content of other curricular subjects (Driscoll and Frost, 1999). Integrating is where teachers relate the content of MFL lessons to different topics that children have already learned or are going to learn in other subjects. The following are examples of how teachers can use an MFL (music, e.g. Songs); (geography, e.g. historical events, famous people and the language); (mathematics, e.g. number games); (science, e.g. healthy food); and (PE, e.g. games) (Sharpe, 2001; Kirsch, 2008).

- **Learning resources:** are 'props' that teachers use to support students to meet the expectations for learning (Jones and Coffey, 2006). Learning resources cover a

wide range of curriculum areas through basic traditional resources, e.g. a book based learning system, flashcards and word cards. In addition to the recent technology such as audios, videos, online learning (Holaday et al., 2013) and the use of computers and smart boards (Pachler, Evans and Lawes, 2007) are commonly used. Macrory, Chrétien and Luis Ortega-Martín (2012) noted, however, that with languages being introduced at a time when new technologies provide plenty of possibilities, it is important to know the best way to use these technologies. Jones and Coffey (2013) argue that technology can help all abilities, special educational needs, and leads students to engage with the MFL as it combines sound and images, video games and songs.

Indeed, there has been an increasing interest in using technology such as smart boards (Jones and Coffey, 2013) and video conferencing (Pritchard, et al., 2010) in MFL classrooms. Gerard et al. (1999) refer to three advantages of using the smart board. Firstly, it helps to present the new linguistic and cultural elements (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, idioms, structures and cultural elements). Secondly, it supports interaction with the class and gives the learners the opportunity to share, participate and contribute in the learning process. Finally, it promotes the teacher's organisational skills (e.g. to access saved notes such as vocabulary).

In their report on an EU-funded project that explored the impact of video-conferencing on primary school children's language learning in England, France and Spain, Macrory, Chrétien and Luis Ortega-Martín (2012) found that video-conferencing has a fundamental effect upon learners' progress in terms of motivation and attitudes. Furthermore, they discovered that it makes positive improvements in terms of developing understanding about other children's lives (e.g. intercultural understanding).

In another study about the use of technology, Chen, Quadir and Teng (2011) aim to explore the integration of book, computer and robot in creating a novel and joyful English learning environment for Taiwan primary students. Five learning activities

were designed in the new system, including vocabulary, conversation read-along, conversation role-play, singing and dancing. Students interacted with the computer by radio-frequency identification technology used to wirelessly connect the book and computer, and ZigBee technology to wirelessly connect the computer and the robot. Results from field observations and interviews found that this system can enrich students' learning experience and increase their motivation and engagement. This highlights the importance of technology in assisting and enhancing language learning in MFL classrooms.

- **Child-centred approaches:** refer to shifting the focus of the activities from the teacher to the students. The traditional school settings used to be 'teacher-centred' where the responsibility for learning was in the teacher's hands. Child-centred approaches refer to giving students opportunities to participate more actively in their learning. According to March (2004:456), the child-centred approach is 'a discourse that situates learning, meaning and motivation within individual children and which emphasises the needs of the individual child'. Sharpe (2001) recommends the use of games because they involve the whole attention of the learner, facilitate repetition of the language, and finally, improve confidence and fluency. Sharpe (2001) and Maynard (2012), presented a list of games, which can be used successfully with learners' language such as bingo, noughts and crosses, Simon says, etc. Sharpe (2001) stated that an MFL primary curriculum should be based on materials, which are relevant to children and also related to the pupils' immediate personal experiences.
- **Time:** although the amount of time spent in learning an MFL is not the only feature for progression in learning a language, Driscoll and Frost (1999), and Sharpe (2001) argue that several studies have considered it to be a significant factor where learners can achieve proficiency. Sharpe (2001) points out that 20 minutes every day tends to be more effective rather than intermittent or sporadic long classes. Although time is an important principle in MFL, the majority of past and recent researchers have tended to focus on the respect for and understanding of other

cultures as another important principle (see Bruniges, 2005; Hood and Tobutt, 2009; Maynard, 2012).

- ***Developing an openness to other cultures:*** According to Field (2000), learning about culture is the most significant aim in the MFL. Also, Pachler, Evans and Lawes (2007) highlight the importance of learning culture in MFL, and they said that to grasp and use a language, learners need socio-cultural knowledge. Driscoll and Frost (1999) argue that 'language is a primary element of culture, without reference to the native culture, foreign language learning might be reduced to lists of vocabulary, phrases and rules (p.16). It is advantageous to start from an early age to engage children in different cultures to understand and respect different aspects of life, e.g. customs and practices that happen across societies (Maynard, 2012).

Kirsch (2008) points out that early age is a good time to introduce cultures since '..... children are more open to and have less fixed ideas on cultural differences' (p.155). She raises the importance of the structured plan with relevant tasks and contents to be used by teachers to develop children's awareness of cultures. Driscoll and Frost (1999) refer to posters of life and scenes, magazines and using traditional songs and stories on videos or audio tapes as good resources to meet cultural awareness aims. Maynard (2012) talks about the importance of technology (e.g. Skype, video conferencing and email) to interact with children from other countries.

The evidence of this study suggests that from teachers' views it is more successful if the Omani culture is introduced without referring to Anglophone (target language) cultures. It should be kept in mind, as Lui and Leung (2013) argued that 'Education in a particular social environment is influenced in many ways by the culture of such environment and hence differs across countries or regions with different cultural backgrounds' (p.35). From this argument, we can say that teachers' thoughts are highly influenced by their background culture. Learning about culture in MFL, in my view, is particularly important for students in Oman. The number of Omani students

going abroad to study rose to 8,156 in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2014). As foreigners with the lack of knowledge within the culture of those countries, students struggle in their first year.

To conclude while structured, well-designed principles tend to be a significant and important issue in an MFL curriculum, it is also important for teachers to have enough knowledge about specific subject pedagogy issues in teaching MFL. In what follows, the researcher will discuss this with reference to developing the four linguistic skills.

2.1.4 Developing Linguistic Skills

Language learning is normally discussed in terms of developing four linguistic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (see Tierney and Gallastegi, 2005; Jones and McLachlan 2009; Storm, 2009). However, there is a debate about whether all four skills should receive equitable attention at the primary level (e.g., whether there should be a focus on oral/aural skills or reading and writing skills). Jones and Coffey (2013) indicate the importance of listening and speaking in primary MFL, but they also suggest the blending of reading and writing at suitable points to support oral/aural skills. Driscoll and Frost (1999), in considering the four skills claim that all skills are, to a certain extent, interrelated, and can in very rare cases be completely separated but they all involve both social and cognitive processes. Driscoll and Frost (1999) also see that there are strategies to introduce and develop each skill, and argue that promoting these skills separately is not inconsistent with the holistic approach.

Jones and Coffey (2013) argue that in order to plan a lesson, teachers should follow three stages (the 'three Ps') presentation, practice and production. The presentation stage '*planning*' is about what to teach (teachers may be guided by the scheme sets, for example, pedagogic decisions and the content). The practice stage is where learners are involved in more teacher-directed activities which lessen as they become

more proficient. The final stage, production, is where learners are ready to use the language more independently.

2.1.5 The Receptive Skills: Listening and Reading

2.1.5.1 Listening

Listening is the first skill children practice in their MFL learning (Driscoll and Frost, 1999). Rost (2006:49), in considering the listening instruction in the teaching of L2 listening skill, presented four primary goals (a) to improve learners' comprehension of spoken language; (b) to increase the quality of learners' uptake (e.g. the words actually retained) from spoken input; (c) to develop learners' strategies for understanding spoken discourse; and (d) to encourage learner participation in face-to-face communication.

It is assumed that children need to listen to a new language before speaking it. The period between listening and reproducing support Krashen's claim (1984, cited in Jones and Coffey, 2013) about the significance of the 'silent period' in which children are exposed to input before their output. It is important to realise that children need enough time to be able to produce the new words, and teachers should repeat a new word or phrase several times before inviting learners to repeat (Jones and Coffey, 2013). In addition to proper diction and clear sound, it is necessary to ensure that learners get a good model of speech and be capable of distinguishing between individual words from a series of sounds (Jones and Mclachlan, 2009).

In creating a listening activity, Jones and Mclachlan (2009) indicate that it must be linked to the current context for learning; pre-and post-listening activities must be planned carefully; the amount of time the activity will take and learners' engagement must be planned carefully; how to support less able and how to challenge outstanding

learners are also issues to be noted for successful listening activities. Jones and Mclachlan refer to dictation (an alternative form of listening activity) as a beneficial task in an MFL classroom. They raise the importance of supporting learners with neat writing, punctuation, spelling and listening carefully.

Teachers are also advised to encourage MFL learners to listen to the tape or other media to give them opportunities to reproduce the language they hear. Furthermore, teachers can use traditional items such as flash cards, body language and technology (T.V. and videos) to present the new language. Jones and Coffey (2013), have argued that teachers can use specific activities through games to focus learners' attention on specific information such as sounds.

2.1.5.2 Reading

To develop reading skills, research tends to indicate the significance of providing students with rules, which allow them to decode different items of the language (Driscoll and Frost, 1999). According to Kirsch (2008), decoding requires five different skills: *knowing the ways in which sound and letters are related*: this could be developed within what Driscoll and Frost (1999) refer to as 'phonic cloud' activity. It is a cut-out of a cloud shape with phonic groupings written as a single letter or clusters suspended from the ceiling of the classroom. Learners can do it with phoneme sounds (spelt the same) and homophones (spelt differently). Each time children encountered a new word with a particular phonic they can add it as a new cloud. *Building out words from sounds and syllables*: where teachers can use activities to encourage learners to join up letters/syllables to create new words (e.g. names of animals). This example suggests the integration of reading and writing. *Identifying words*: teachers can use activities (e.g. recognising words in mirror writing, or partly hidden). *Understanding the meaning of the words, sentences and texts*: Sharpe (2001) recommends games such as dominoes, and card games to make learners practise reading. Finally, in terms of pronunciation, teachers can encourage learners to read carefully and encourage self-

correction of their mistakes. This suggests the importance of teachers' guidance and support for teaching different reading skills/ strategies.

This issue is also highlighted in Macaro and Mutton's (2009) study. In their small-scale exploratory study of Year 6 (ages 10–11) children learning French, they compared a group of students who were given materials to develop their 'inferencing strategies' with a group of students who were exposed to 'graded French readers' without any strategy instruction. Both groups were, in turn, compared with a control group which continued with their usual learning practice. They found that the inferencing group was learning the words better than the other two groups. They also found that both the 'inferencing strategies group' and the 'graded readers group' made significant advances in their reading comprehension. Macaro and Mutton (2009) believe that the cognitive strategies used in inferring meaning from the surrounding text and by consequence, knowledge of the topic area, must be encouraged and taught to the learners. This highlights the importance of teaching reading strategies to learners of MFL and also the importance of the teacher's role in modelling, encouraging and questioning learners to ensure their comprehension in reading skill.

Similarly, Phillips' (2013) case study that explored how teachers' questions during guided reading scaffolded year three children's understanding of reading, established that 'effective questioning seemed to employ a conversational technique whereby prompting statements and interpretations developed pupils' inferential comprehension' (p. 117).

In the light of the above, it may be that the lack of strategies and lack of support during 'reading time' in Omani primary classrooms, could be explanatory factors of Omani learners' low-level achievement in reading skill.

2.1.6 The Productive Skills: Speaking and Writing

2.1.6.1 Speaking

Obilisteanu (2009) identifies three types of speaking activities that should be introduced to primary students through textbooks, drills, communication activities and natural language use. Using drills is where learners are supported to master some of the basic forms of the language with a reasonable degree of accuracy through repetition. Through communication activities (e.g. information-gap, problem-solving, role-plays, quizzes) where learners work in groups or pairs, pupils have the freedom to use the language more independently. These scaffolded exercises aim to develop learners' confidence to use the language. The third type is natural language use, where learners express what they want to say in a foreign language about themselves and their own interests. As outlined earlier, this follows the three Ps model, which is recommended for teachers to follow for planning a lesson and it seems there is a relationship between the three stages and the method employed for introducing the speaking activity. These three types are frequently found within Omani context textbooks.

Hood and Tobutt (2009) argue that communication is a vital part of language learning and teaching. Through communication, children can express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Therefore, Hood and Tobutt (2009) emphasise real communication through authentic communicative messages, where the aim is more to develop awareness and the real purpose for the language rather than contrived language (Driscoll and Frost, 1999). Driscoll and Frost (1999) advised teachers to go beyond lists of vocabulary, structure and function to not 'remain at the level of the phrasebook' (p.75).

Hood and Tobut (2009) also argued that children studying MFL should be exposed to the use of the language for different purposes. They advised embedding the use of

language into routines (e.g. simple greetings instructions: sitting down, finding a partner, tidying up etc.). Similarly, Kirsch (2008) and Jones and Coffey (2013) argue that teachers should encourage learners to use the MFL in the real context around the school and around the classroom in order to practise speaking skills.

For Pachler et al. (2013:237), pronunciation (e.g. knowledge of sounds, intonation and rhythm) is an important 'prerequisite for success in spoken language production as well as in reading'. According to them, this knowledge is a neglected area in MFL classrooms, therefore, teachers need to be aware of its importance.

2.1.6.2 Writing

Jones and Coffey (2013:61) helpfully suggested a line of progression in writing skills for young learners. They advised teachers to present the words orally first before writing them to overcome the possible problem with mispronouncing the written form. Ukrainetz et al. (2000) also believe that the awareness of the sound structure of words leads to the successful development of reading and writing.

Jones and Coffey's idea is to start with (1) copying words e.g. Colours; (2) gap-filling letters into words, e.g. completing learning phrases; (3) copying short phrases e.g. Card Greetings; (4) gap-filling words into short phrases e.g. completing learned songs; (5) copying sentences - e.g. from the board or dictation; (6) gap filling short phrases into sentences e.g. description of topics; (7) producing words, e.g. written topic lists in a game; (8) producing short phrases, e.g. describing pictures, finishing off sentences; and finally, (9) producing sentences e.g. writing a fuller description. Such techniques highlight that teaching writing to young learners of MFL may take different ways of practising, spelling, handwriting, and creating stories and other texts (Storm, 2009).

Although the majority of research has tended to focus on the teaching of reading skill, some scholars have also drawn attention to 'shared writing' where teachers set up a

comfortable area with a rug in a quiet corner of the classroom. The teacher and students create text together, with both contributing their thoughts and ideas to the process, while the teacher acts as a copyist, writing the text as it is composed. The main benefit of this method is outlined by Routman (1994) who maintains that it reinforces and supports reading as well as writing; It makes it possible for all students to participate as it encourages close examination of texts, words, and options of authors, demonstrates the conventions of writing-spelling, punctuation, and grammar, and finally, focuses on composing and leaves transcribing to the teacher. Graves (1994) stated that students need this kind of instruction not once, but at least once a week, in short, focused lessons.

2.1.7 Vocabulary and Grammar

In addition to the importance of the above areas, others, like Coleman and Klapper (2005), suggested that effective language skills required the integration of knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Sharpe (2001) points to the benefits of vocabulary in supporting MFL learners to express their own opinions, while Krich (2008) notes that the aim of teaching vocabulary is to support learners in learning the pronunciation, sounds and the meaning of the words.

Also, the Key Stage Two Framework (2005) for languages addressed the importance of teaching vocabulary and stressed the teachers' role in increasing pupils' store of words. Richards (2001) argues that the question of what words must be taught in an MFL depends on the aims and objectives of the course and time offered for teaching. According to him, a number of criteria are needed in determining the words lists. These include *reachability*: where concrete vocabulary is taught by using total physical response and through pictures. *Similarity*: are items similar to words in the native language. *Availability*: words come quickly to mind when certain topics are thought of (e.g. pupil, teacher, desk, chair). *Coverage*: words include the meaning of other words

(e.g. seat: meaning both chair and stool). *Defining power*: words are useful in defining other words (e.g. container: defines carton and jar).

It is also important to know pedagogical strategies for developing vocabulary knowledge. Some studies, for instance, Gerard, et al. (1999) and Akbulut (2007) reported successful learning of vocabulary with associated pictures or videos. Whereas Maynard (2012) had approached the importance of songs, rhyme and repetition to reinforce vocabulary. Investigating primary school learners in a foreign language-learning situation in Taiwan, Chou (2014) found that the use of games, songs and stories expand the learners' vocabulary size. In another MFL learning context, in Thessaloniki, Greece, Alexiou (2009) also finds that games can be beneficial in vocabulary development. The use of spelling also can support vocabulary development, however, 'having a low vocabulary can trap children in a vicious circle' (The English Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008:5). It is, therefore, appropriate to use games, songs stories and spelling in an MFL primary context to increase young learners' vocabulary knowledge, supporting also a child-centred approach.

In addition to the importance of the vocabulary, some authors critically discussed the grammar issue. Teaching grammar improves learners' reasoning and analytical skills (Kirsch, 2008), and enables the new language to be produced (Hunt and Barnes, 2006). Jones and Coffey (2006) argue that although in our teaching, we need to focus on the 'social-functional' parts of the language; it is unrealistic doing this without referring to the grammatical rules. The earlier National Curriculum Programme of Study (DfES, 2003) also stated that language teaching in schools is aimed at: 'the development of communication skills, together with an understanding of the structure of the language. Maynard (2012) argues that by putting the stress on speaking and listening, children will naturally be able to realise the grammatical concepts. She believes that engaging children e.g. giving them the chance to speak, ask and answer will support their grammar learning. For example, she suggests activities, whereby children justify their likes, dislikes on food and describe what others are wearing, will

enable children to practice using adjectives and gender/plural agreement. The above highlights the importance of the teacher's role, and this suggested as Byrd (1998) argues that understanding the use of forms in context is a powerful tool for teachers of foreign language because it offers them concrete techniques to move away from the abstract discussion about the meanings of forms to a more dynamic, actual, and the appropriate practice of the form.

In teaching grammar, it should be explicit for young children with opportunities for real practice (Jones and Coffey, 2013), and children do need to have clarifications about why things are said in the way they are (Sharp, 2001). In other words, teaching grammar can be problematic for children if rules are not clarified and words were not appropriately used. At the same time, it is important that MFL teachers have the specialised knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy to provide the children with the needed explanation of grammatical rules. I believe the teachers' knowledge about MFL grammar is important and I would argue that this is a top priority for Omani teachers of English as an MFL.

2.1.8 Assessment

Assessment is a data collection that focuses on students' learning and helps to document and provide meaningful feedback on learning outcomes. According to Saricoban and Hasdemir (2012) assessment is a kind of standard that allows teachers and other involved groups to observe and evaluate the teaching and learning procedures. With regard to MFL, Barnes and Hunt (2003) argue that assessment is a continuous process of assessing the abilities and knowledge of learners. They identified some reasons for assessing:

- Help students to know about their achievement.
- Help teachers to lead to improvements in their planning.

- Provide teachers with appropriate decisions about students' attainments.
- Help to shape school targets.
- Inform students on what to do to make progress.

However, the success of any evaluation depends on the selection and the effective use of suitable tools and methods, as well as the correct interpretation of student achievement (Shaaban, 2001), and their level of ability (Saricoban and Hasdemir, 2012). In the following section, I will give an overview of different types of assessment.

2.1.8.1 Types of Classroom Assessment

According to Briggs et al. (2008) and Butler and Lee (2010) foreign language teachers of young learners should use several types of assessment tools such as self-assessment, portfolio, observation, conferences, questioning and summative/formative assessment. All different types of assessments should provide teachers with the information needed to plan for future learning, taking into account that classrooms contain different abilities (Briggs et al., 2008). Saricoban and Hasdemir (2012) claim that using one type of assessment suitable for one group of learners may not be suitable for others, especially for a child with a special learning difficulty. According to them, valid and reliable tools are extremely important to determine or to assure proper treatment for these types of children (special learning).

- **Self-assessment:** a number of authors have addressed the importance of 'self-assessment' (e.g. Paris and Paris, 2001; Dann, 2002; Butler and Lee, 2010; Briggs et al., 2008). It is recommended to use self-assessment for the following reasons: 1) it encourages learners to learn self-organization and self-governance (Paris and Paris, 2001), 2) allows teachers to gain clarity about the learners' level (Butler and Lee, 2010). Finally, 3) the results can help both teachers and parents to see the child's ability to learn, and what skills the child needs to improve (Liebovich, 2000). With regard to MFL learning, Saricoban and Hasdemir (2012) argue that this type

of assessment allows both teachers and learners to be partners in the learning procedure. Jones and McLachlan (2009) also support the use of self-assessment in MFL curriculum, because they believe that learning goals and success conditions need to be shared with and be understood by students.

Butler and Lee (2010) conducted a study into the effectiveness of self-assessment among young learners of English as a foreign language in South Korea. The participants in their study were 254 6th grade students from two state primary schools. The learners were asked to perform self-assessments on a regular basis for a semester during their English classes. They found this had a positive impact on the student learning a foreign language and their confidence. They also found that teachers and students had seen the effectiveness of self-assessment differently depending upon the contexts of teaching/ learning as well as individual teacher's views about assessment.

However, using self-assessment with children appears to be a negative factor that was identified by some authors. Children's abilities are limited and may need help from adults or more capable peers (Zimmerman, 1989). However, Briggs et al. (2008) found that all primary children are able to cope with self-assessment, which will train them to be more accurate and competent with increased age.

- **Portfolio:** is a type of record of the child's process of learning. A portfolio is a collection of a student's work assembled for the purpose of determining whether students have met learning requirements (Smith and Tillema, 2003). The portfolio can include work samples such as children's drawings, writings, videos, tape recordings and projects (Shaaban, 2001; Saricoban and Hasdemir, 2012). According to Grace (1992), a portfolio should have a purpose, otherwise, it will be only a folder of student work and should be well organised to help the teacher assess the child's progress.

- **Observation:** is an informal technique of assessment. Teachers have to observe what is going on around the classroom and watch students to identify their cognitive strategies, behaviour, strengths and weaknesses. Since observation needs the teacher to notice what is going on around the classroom, it can be a challenge for the teachers as they cannot keep track of everything (Briggs et al., 2008). Briggs et al. describe two kinds of observation: a 'planned observation' and 'unplanned observation'. A planned observation has a clear focus on individuals, groups and particular actions, whereas in unplanned observation teachers notice achievement in learning that needs to be noted.
- **Questioning Children:** As Briggs et al. (2008) suggest, this type can be used for some important reasons such as assessing children's comprehension and mistakes, to know how the child is thinking, and at the same time it helps teachers shaping classroom discussions by using children's ideas. According to Buyukkarci (2014), the value of the assessment is affected by the value of the questioning. He advised that questions should be premeditated and arranged so teachers can elicit a proper response from the children to show what children understood, knew, and could do. According to Harlen (2007), questioning children is an important element in formative assessment.
- **Formative assessment:** emphasises the role played by students in the learning process (Lee, 2011) and focuses on students' needs (Brookhart, 2010). McIntosh (2015) reports some principles in the form of questions that teachers should ask themselves to help them to develop effective tests:
 1. What skills and bodies of knowledge that children are expected to know;
 2. How to communicate the test results to students to help them improve;
 3. How to ensure that students understand the purpose of the test;
 4. How to that the ensure test is suitable ability level for different;
 5. How to use test results to inform future planning.

According to McIntosh (2015:22), 'The primary principle of assessment is that it should be fit for the purpose intended' and '...provide information which is clear, reliable and free from bias'. Jones and Coffey (2013) strongly emphasise the importance of formative assessment in MFL classrooms. They argued that formative assessment is 'a good shift tool for making the shift in the classroom from passive recipients by the pupils to metacognition and the development of learning and thinking skills' (p. 119).

Buyukkarci (2014) refers to the feedback as the main part of formative assessment. Buyukkarci points out that teachers can use evaluative feedback, where mostly grading and descriptive feedback are given in details for learners. Buyukkarci conducted a study on the use of a formative assessment of learning English as a second language in primary school in Adana, Turkey. Questionnaires and interviews with primary school English language teachers working in different states revealed important issues. Buyukkarci found that although teachers have positive attitudes toward the use of formative assessment, it was very rare that they use it in their classes. Teachers were concerned about overcrowded classrooms (60 students in a class) and a heavy workload. Furthermore, he discovered that teachers mostly use summative assessment in their schools.

- **Summative assessment:** is allocating students a grade at the end of a course or project (Buyukkarci, 2014). According to Jones and Coffey (2006), this type of assessment can have a negative effect on students because the grades do not always provide encouragement.

Even if the types of MFL assessments in the primary schools are determined to be of great importance, the accurate implementation of those types is still an issue. Butler (2009) conducted a study in South Korea, Taiwan and Japan to identify what is known and what needs to be understood of how English foreign language teaching in primary schools may be more effectively implemented. He conducted a survey and interviewed students, teachers and parents and quoted a number of

studies from those countries concerning the teacher-based assessment of foreign languages. According to Butler, both the Korean and Taiwanese governments asked their teachers to implement both formal and teacher-based assessments, the latter involving interviews, portfolio, self- assessments, peer assessments and classroom observations. Teachers should then use this data to provide students with positive verbal feedback in report cards, as opposed to giving their students numerical scores or grades. Butler found that students in South Korea perceived this approach to have positive effects on oral skills and reading, but limited effects on writing and grammar. He also found that teachers seem to have some problems in implementing teacher-based assessments systematically in their classrooms. These challenges are due to 'lack of knowledge about teacher-based assessment, large class sizes, lack of sufficient time to administer the teacher-based assessment, and lack of information on how best to use information gained through teacher-based assessment for formative and/or summative purposes' (p. 21). Butler's findings are directly relevant to this study as it shows that his participants are facing challenges with assessment similar to the teachers in my own study.

2.1.8.2 Difficulty in Assessment Design

In the past, in some countries, educational assessment materials were chosen at the level of the Ministry of Education, school region or school administration (Shaaban, 2001), but these days, as Lee (2010), claim a number of governments have stopped using standardised tests in primary schools. Fradd and Hudelson (1995: 5) argued that the 'control over the collection and interpretation of assessment information has shifted from centralised authority towards the classrooms where assessment occurs on a regular basis'. Shaaban (2001) argues that this change gave the classroom teachers a critical role in students' assessment and the opportunity to look for new evaluation methods to assess students' progress.

Saricoban and Hasdemir (2012) discovered that in Turkey, in most state schools, FL teachers prefer to use ready-made tests. Saricoban and Hasdemir (2012) claimed that this kind of assessment may fail to measure what is intended to test and therefore may severely destroy the method of teaching and learning as well. Furthermore, they stated that ready-made tests are not suitable in terms of validity and reliability. This suggests that ready-made tests may lack what teachers want students to achieve e.g. the course outcomes. Learning outcomes should be aligned with the assessment in order to help students understand and help teachers to focus on what they want the learners to achieve. Nunan (1989) and Purpura (2004); argued that exam tasks should look similar to the instructional tasks that FL learners are exposed to use in the class. The findings indicated that MFL teachers lacked an understanding of the accurate implementation of different types of assessment, and this limited knowledge seemed to have an impact on how they intended to assess MFL primary learners.

Conclusion

In summary, this section of the literature review highlights the importance of appropriate pedagogy and methodology for teachers teaching an MFL. I would argue that training programmes, in which theoretical and practical knowledge about these are central, should be a top priority. In the following section, the researcher will discuss the importance of teacher training and development.

2.2 Teacher Training

2.2.1 Teacher Training and Development Issues

Teacher training programmes are supposed to expose teachers to the skills, knowledge, and strategies related to teaching and learning of new ideas (Wolter, 2000;

Barnett, 2004). They should increase teachers' knowledge of the educational field by introducing them to the latest techniques, research and theory and give them opportunities to practice and receive feedback on particular techniques and encourage them to discuss their needs.

However, much of the research and the context of the debate in the field of teacher education in general, and in modern foreign language teacher education in particular, are about the lack of pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes. In Oman, the inadequate preparation of teachers of English as a second language in the primary sector is an issue as it is in other Asia-Pacific regions (Nunan, 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to consider the importance of teacher training programmes. It presents an overview of pre-service and in-service MFL teacher training programmes by considering teachers' knowledge and skills, beliefs, identity, reflective practice, as well as the significance of practical experience. The role of professional development programmes for in-service teachers and their professionalism are discussed. The final section focuses on the concept of 'community of practice'.

2.2.2 Teacher Training or Teacher Education?

Teacher preparation and development can be viewed and conceptualised very differently. A central matter is whether to use the term 'teacher training' or 'teacher education'. The former is associated with practical knowledge, as Stephens, Tonnessen and Kyriacou (2004) noted 'training' envisages effective teaching as equivalent to performing set mechanical tasks well' (p.111) and takes a more technical approach. By contrast, 'teacher education' is about developing a deeper knowledge and understanding about learning and teaching. Although these terms are used interchangeably, it seems that education specialists, particularly teacher educators in universities, prefer the term 'education' for the broad process of teacher preparation. Stephens, Tonnessen and Kyriacou (2004) explain that teacher education encourages

beginning and in-service teachers to reflect and act upon the practical implications of educational theory, instruct pupils in National Curriculum subjects, display leadership in the classroom, act as a member of a caring profession, promote [certain] values and provide pupils with a safe learning environment' (p.111). Alibaba Erden and Ozer (2013) believed that teacher education should have professional teaching standards that train teachers about teaching and learning criteria, manage teacher preparation and professional development to be highly qualified teachers. According to them, pre-service training should offer trainees specialist subject training to develop the necessary knowledge and understanding of their subject(s) and related pedagogy and pedagogy content knowledge and focus on research skills. In the event of failure to meet all the standards, the trainee cannot receive the award of qualified teacher status. This, in turn, is helpful to know that upon graduating, teachers have achieved the relevant standards, and their appointments in schools can be managed successfully (Alibaba Erden and Ozer, 2013).

Whilst the researcher endorses the principles of 'teacher education', in this chapter she will use the term 'teacher training' as it appeared to be most frequently used in many studies. Irrespective of which term is used, it is important to acknowledge the continuum of teachers' professional learning. As Flores et al. (2014) point out, 'pre-service training' is the first step in a long process of preparation to prepare teachers for their professional roles and thus, there is a relationship between pre-service and in-service training. Stuart and Tatto (2000) argue that 'the professional preparation of teachers is seen in terms of lifelong learning, where initial training, induction and in-service development are seen as part of a continuum' (p. 501). Sentosa and Arlianti's (n.d.) study in Indonesia working with stakeholders from various institutions and schools examining how the pre-service education programs can be linked with in-service professional development, found that this partnership was effective to better equip future teachers with curriculum implementation.

Tzivinikou (2015:96) remarks, 'Lifelong learning' and 'in-service training' are used interchangeably to refer to teachers' professional development as well as the attempt

for continuous improvement of the offered educational services and in-service training is one of those most appropriate and easily accessible processes for developing teachers' performance. Furthermore, equipping them with the necessary knowledge behaviours, goals, attitudes, and skills (Guskey, 2003; Shinde and Karekatti, 2012).

Whilst there is an abundant literature including empirical studies that discuss and investigate pre and in-service teacher training in general, the number of empirical studies in the field of MFL is limited (Schulz, 2000; Velez-Rendon 2002; Watzke, 2007). Schulz (2000) noted that 'FL teacher preparation is still long on rhetoric, opinions and traditional dogma, and short on empirical research that attempts to verify those opinions or traditional practice' (p. 516-517). Research in this field is often small-scale as it is conducted by practitioners who research their own practice.

Research on the appropriate content for teacher education programmes indicates that there are some key aspects that should be considered in programme design. These include attention to subject knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, teacher beliefs and identities and the importance of reflective practice: teachers' education programs, teachers' knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987); beliefs; identity and reflective practice can influence their practice. As a means of focusing this discussion, the following section concentrates on these themes from the general literature. Where work has been carried out relating to language teachers, this will be integrated into the review.

2.2.3 Teachers' Knowledge and Skills

2.2.3.1 Subject Knowledge and Pedagogical Content Knowledge

'To improve classroom teaching in a steady, lasting way, the teaching profession needs a knowledge base that grows and improves' (Hiebert, Gallimore and Stigler, 2002:3).

Scholars in the field of education have paid attention to the 'knowledge base of teaching'. The argument of the knowledge base within a theoretical and epistemological framework was introduced by Lee Shulman (1986, 1987) who has identified seven categories for a knowledge base: content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge; curriculum knowledge; knowledge of learners and their characteristics; knowledge of educational context; knowledge of educational ends; and pedagogical content knowledge (p. 8). The most specific interest has been directed toward teachers' knowledge of content knowledge (Kleickmann et al., 2013) and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (e.g. Grossman, 1990 and Rohaan et al., 2012). Shulman's content knowledge component comprises both the amount of the subject knowledge as well as the organising structure of the subject (Shulman, 1986, 1987). Subject knowledge is about what teachers need to know about what they teach. It is 'beyond the knowledge of the facts or concepts of a domain' (Shulman, 1986:9). Whereas PCK 'represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instructions' (p. 8). Shulman (1986) argues that PCK includes significant analogies, ideas, examples, clarifications, illustrations and demonstrations to foster a meaningful understanding. PCK is the combination of teachers' pedagogical knowledge and their subject matter knowledge.

According to McNamara (1991), subject knowledge offers the substantive content for most lessons. In other words, teachers need to know 'the variety of ways in which the basic concepts and principles of the discipline are organized to incorporate its facts as well as the syntactic structure, which is 'the set of ways in which truth or falsehood, validity or invalidity, are established' (Shulman, 1986:9).

In the field of second language teaching, Woodgate-Jones (2008) argues that teachers' subject knowledge requires both linguistic competence and cultural understanding (this has already been discussed in section 2.1.3). Richards (1998) argues that pre-service and in-service training programmes for the foreign language

teacher focus on developing linguistic competence such as phonetics and phonology; English syntax; discourse analysis; second language acquisition; sociolinguistics; curriculum and syllabus design; and testing and evaluation. To gain such knowledge teachers use their own K-12 learning experiences, e.g. their beliefs, teacher education and professional development *programs* and *their teaching experiences* (Friedrichsen et al., 2009).

Woodgate-Jones (2008) investigates primary MFL pre-service teachers' confidence in their linguistic competence and intercultural understanding in 18 teacher education institutions in the UK. Half of the participants spent at least six months living abroad in a country that speaks the target language prior to the beginning of the Primary Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course and almost a quarter of them spent between 1 and 6 months. The author found that the taught course had not improved pre-service teachers' linguistic competence or intercultural understanding and according to the pre-service teachers these areas would be accomplished through the practicum abroad. The author argued that due to the intensive PGCE course with little time available to develop an individual's own linguistic competence as well as developing their understanding of primary MFL pedagogy, the practicum abroad would appear vital.

The author also found that the pre-service teachers were comparing the theoretical underpinnings of the UK education system with that of the host country (e.g. pedagogical methods/practices participants observed in the classroom). 'Observation of different kinds of second language classes can be used to orient student teachers to the nature of the second language classroom (its organisation, practices and norms)' (Richard, 1998:19). Furthermore, Woodgate-Jones (2008) found that the participants preferred to observe in-service teachers specialising in primary MFL, rather than a teacher who had not been specifically trained. This highlights the issue of good models for the pre-service teachers to observe.

In another study of teachers completing teacher professional development languages programme in New Zealand, Richards et al. (2013) found that teachers with lower levels of target language proficiency were unable to provide correct pronunciation of new words for their students, unable to provide meaningful explanations of vocabulary and grammar compared with the high level of target language proficiency teachers. The authors also found that teachers who attended in-country language learning experience used their knowledge of the culture to contextualise the language. Richards et al. (2013) highlight the role of subject knowledge to deliver rich language input and meaningful clarifications for learners.

The practicum abroad would be an important approach that pre-service teachers can develop their subject knowledge; improve their classroom practices, e.g. through linking between theory and practice (this issue is explored further in section 2.2.7).

On the other hand, in a foreign language context, Watzke (2007) conducted a study focusing on how PCK is initially applied and subsequent changes during the beginning teaching experiences of MFL teachers in the United States. Watzke (2007) found that with increasing PCK, the beginning teachers were increasingly more able to make decisions that were suitable for their students.

Also in a foreign language context, Richards (1998) develops Shulman's notion of PCK, developing his own framework serving as a core knowledge base for modern foreign language teacher education. He identified six domains of expertise, knowledge and skills. These will now be discussed in detail, drawing partly on findings by the similar research of other writers. This includes:

1. **Theories of teaching.** These refer to the understanding of the nature of classroom practices.
2. **Teaching skills.** These refer to teaching acts that had been emphasised by Shulman (1986) who used the term 'instruction' such as (explaining, reviewing,

presenting learning activities etc.). Richards (1998) claimed that teacher training schemes for English second/foreign teaching qualification put forward other skills to acquire by second language teaching, for example, preparation of communication interaction activities (e.g. group work, games, role plays, simulation); organization and facilitation of communicative interaction; judgment of proper balance between fluency and accuracy, awareness of learners' errors and finally appropriate treatment of errors.

Nevertheless, some writers point to the importance of professional development of teachers with technological knowledge and skills (Mustafa and Bakir, 2010; Kiper and Tercan, 2012). Kabakçi (2009) stated that 'Technology use is brought forward as a new dynamic which aims at transferring traditional teaching-learning environments and teacher-learner roles' (p. 213).

3. **Communication skills.** These refer to the ability to communicate effectively. For example, Richards (1998) argues that the teacher's inability to communicate can lead to a lack of clear explanations for students. The importance of these skills has also been emphasised by Andrews (2003), who argued that 'teachers' language awareness is seen as a sub-component of PCK, forming a bridge between knowledge of subject matter and communicative language ability' (p. 75). In effect, the teachers must know 'the way of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others' (Shulman, 1986:9).
4. **Subject matter knowledge.** This refers to what teachers need to know (e.g. theories and specialised concepts).
5. **Pedagogical reasoning and decision-making.** This refers to teachers' ability to make appropriate decisions for a specific lesson they are teaching in order to provide optimal support for learning.

- 6. Contextual knowledge.** This refers to the ability to identify and understand relevant contextual factors (e.g. role of school culture, society and community) and how the practice of language teaching is formed by the context in which it takes place.

In spite of a proliferation of studies (Kleickmann et al., 2013) that indicate the strong impact of sound PCK on student progress, Walker (2012) has established that sometimes personal backgrounds can clash with PCK that is introduced in courses. He suggests that pre-service training programmes should 'support the ongoing transformation of pedagogical content knowledge in order to ensure that these early characteristics do not become lasting traits in long-term teaching careers' (p. 63).

Furthermore, teacher training and development courses should consider exploration of the role of teachers' beliefs (the focus of the following section). As Wu (1998:11) explains, where the received knowledge clashes with teachers' thinking and usual practice, new ideas may be rejected or only those bits that suit the teachers will be accepted'.

2.2.4 Beliefs

Since 1980, a particular focus about beliefs has born an influence on the research field. Several studies reveal that pre-service and in-service teachers enter training programmes with existing values, views, beliefs, and experiences that influence their practice in the classroom (Numrich, 1996; Wu, 1998; Freeman and Johnson, 1998). Cognisant of this research, Farrell (2006) asked pre-service teachers to write a journal before they went on teaching practice to describe their beliefs about teaching and learning using metaphors. After the teaching practice, they were asked to discuss metaphors used in their writing. Farrell found that although after six weeks of teaching practices two participants were influenced by their initial teaching and learning, one participant changed his beliefs about classroom issues. In other words, the participant

realised that his previously stated metaphors were no longer suitable and that the use of metaphors in journal writing had helped him in his development.

Sanchez and Borg (2014) found that in addition to in-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) (e.g. the use of analogies, metaphors, repetition, visual support, etc.), teachers used techniques that aligned well with their overall L2 teaching approach and their stated beliefs (e.g. their beliefs about the importance of grammar in L2 learning). This suggests that teachers' beliefs are extremely influential in their classroom practice and that teacher development courses must take this into account. Indeed, this finding confirms Farrell's (2006) suggestion that language teachers should be encouraged to unpick and examine their beliefs about teaching and learning, to be aware of the source of these beliefs, and that this process should guide decision-making about future actions (see Farrell, 2006).

According to Opfer, Pedder, and Lavicza (2011:7), there are internal, external and collaborative orientation sources of belief that teachers bring to their professional learning. Internal source (e.g. reflection, modifying, and experimenting as individual teachers). An external source (e.g. information and knowledge about their professional learning, collaborative professional learning and the importance of research for professional learning) as well policy documents can influence what teachers do in their classrooms (Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer, 2002).

As argued earlier the themes discussed in this section overlap, for example, the role of PCK and beliefs interact. The changeability of PCK is partly influenced by pre-service programmes and the in-service teaching context (Zeichner and Liston, 1987), but partly also by previous beliefs related to teaching and learning.

2.2.5 Identity

Related to teacher beliefs is teacher identity. As Korthagen (2004) explains, the central questions in teacher development are ‘who am I?’, ‘what kind of teacher do I want to be?’, and ‘how do I see my role as a teacher?’ (p. 81). He argued that these questions are vital when it comes to developing a professional identity. Xu (2013) investigated a four-year longitudinal case study of four Chinese EFL teachers on their professional identity change in the last year of pre-service training and the first three years of in-service in China. Participants in their last year of pre-service training cited *what kind of EFL teachers they wished to be* after graduation. Xu (2013) noticed that on the one hand, some participants used their previous EFL teacher as a model; on the other hand, others used personal education programmes. It seems that the imagined identities pre-service teachers had in the language classrooms and in their teacher education programmes were the basis for shaping their practices. It is also evident that their beliefs influence their imagined identities.

Furthermore, Xu (2013) found that in the first three years of participants’ in-service stage their imagined identities changed to rule-based identities except one participant. It seems that the practices of these language teachers were shaped by the role of Contextual influences. This finding illustrates how Richards’ (1998) domain of ‘*contextual knowledge*’ (e.g. School administrative practices) shaped the participants’ practices.

On the other hand, the fourth participant imagined the identity she had as a pre-service EFL teacher to be a good learning facilitator had a crucial influence on her understanding of an EFL responsibility whatever school circumstances. Williams and Locke (1999) also offered an important discussion that can influence teachers’ identity in schools: ‘*supervisors’ roles*’. In their discussion, they reported Kram (1983), who suggested that positive guidance provided by supervisors, can enhance teachers’ feeling of proficiency and their identity. This suggests that teachers’ identities also play an important role in shaping their practices.

2.2.6 Reflective Practice

The central role of reflective practice for trainee teachers has been promoted by a number of studies (e.g. Ward and McCotter, 2004; Schön, 1983, 1987; Calderhead and Gates, 1993; Moon, 2004; Pollard and Collins, 2005; Brookfield, 2002). It involves learning from one's own learning (McLeod and Reynolds, 2007), where actions, knowledge and attitudes about learning and teaching can be examined (Whitton, et al., 2004).

Many educationalists promote the use of reflective journals for recording professional judgements, reflections, and knowledge (McLeod and Reynolds, 2007). Journals can also help pre-service teachers to gain a greater awareness of their identity and mission (Korthagen, 2004). Goldman and Grimbeek (2015), however, point out that student teachers need guidance in analysis from teacher trainers when recording reflections on experiences in journals. Similarly, Yayli (2009) suggested that participation in journal writing with a course tutor is one way of developing reflective skills.

In contrast, the research study conducted by Farrell (2008) supports the importance of the reflective method in the pre-service programmes. The author examined the role of the types of a reflection written in reflective journals written by pre-service English language teachers. He explained how reflective writing provides some insights into the images that a select group of pre-service English language teachers hold about teaching and learning English as a foreign language.

In order to engage in reflective practice, however, the teacher needs something to reflect on, i.e. professional practice. If teacher education involves the development of a broad knowledge from different sources, the reflection would involve the consideration of theory and research in relation to practice. Indeed, a major issue identified in pre-service programmes is the need to reconcile the gap between theory and practice.

2.2.7 The Significance of Practical Experience

Universities have been frequently criticised for implementing courses in which theory is presented without much connection to practice (Yayli, 2008). Grisham (2000) points out that it is beneficial for pre-service teachers to experience 'instruction- based knowledge' at colleges and universities as well as to experience fieldwork. This had also been emphasised by Darling-Hammond (2000), who argued that influential training programmes allow trainee teachers to spend more time in schools to test and apply concepts and approaches learnt in their educational programmes.

Whilst in Western countries the significance of practical experiences has been emphasised for several years (Furlong and Smith, 1996; Hagger and McIntyre, 2000) there have been challenges in reconciling theory and practice. Nonetheless, there have been significant developments in teacher education to respond to the challenges. For example, some universities focused much of their teacher training efforts out into the schools (Bencze, Hewitt, and Pedretti, 2001).

Since there seems to be a process of continual learning between universities and schools, pre-service teachers need to improve their own practice through examining, experiencing and employing skills to connect theory and practice in a real teaching and learning context. Furthermore, it is an opportunity for observing, being involved in the school life and, experiencing planning and the curriculum (Smedley, 2001; Thompson and Crooner, 2001). One such study was conducted by Hagger et al. (2008), examining the beginning teachers' development thinking and practice, where lesson observations and interviews with 25 students of English, mathematics and science teachers of initial teacher training took place. The majority of participants in their study argued that they were trying out ideas presented in the university, implementing teaching tasks outlined in a school planner, and reflecting on what they thought they need to learn. The participants greatly valued the opportunity to learn from their own practice. They also stressed the benefits of advice and feedback from their mentor, input from the university and observation of other teachers' lessons.

Another way of bridging theory with practice is through the 'Educational Rounds Model'. This model was borrowed from a training model used in hospitals where doctors and teaching doctors examined and discussed patients together and then conducted research about each incident. Del Prete (2006) used this model to engage school teachers, lecturers and pre-service students in a professional learning community as a continuous process in a real context, establishing that the rounds are a good example of teacher development that bridges the gap between theory and practice. Bowman and Herrelko (2014) showed how the rounds model in their study was an opportunity for pre-service teachers to share their observational data and beliefs about teaching with the experienced classroom teacher.

Besides the importance of the aspects of initial teacher preparation discussed above, we also need to consider the significance of effective training programmes after the transition from initial preparation to working life. In the following section, there will be a closer examination of studies specifically related to the field of MFL.

2.2.8 Professional Development Programmes for In-Service Teachers

In-service professional development programmes have always played a significant role in teacher education. These programmes are often based on short workshops or conference attendance (Boyle, While and Boyle, 2004). In-service training programmes have been found to be an important course to provide teachers with greater understanding of up to date issues to prepare students for new economic cultural and social challenges, as well as to enhance motivation (Deshmukh and Mishra, 2014). While some researchers (see Shah, Mahmood, and Hussain, 2011; Omar, 2014) have stressed that these programmes are important for gaining confidence in teaching skills and making progress in teachers' performance. Although there is much agreement about the importance of professional development for in-service teachers, there is less agreement about the effectiveness of these programmes

(Gibbs and Coffey, 2004; Banegas, 2011; Shinde and Karekatti, 2012) or whether the goals are being met (Trowler, 2005), particularly in an MFL context (Velez-Rendon, 2002). Many of the challenges with these programmes appear to be related to policy issues.

Various studies in the field of in-service teacher education suggest that problems stem from policy implementation with inadequate attention to the infrastructure for teacher development. This includes lack of funding for courses and materials; lack of specialist teachers in MFL; and inadequate training of teachers. What follows is a discussion of some of these challenges and some proposed solutions.

- ***Lack of funding for courses and materials.*** Nunan (2003) points out that governments and ministries in the Asia-Pacific region believe that 'younger is better' as mentioned in the previous chapter and introduce English as a compulsory subject, but with inadequate funding, lack of attention to teacher training for primary school teachers, and curricula and materials. Nunan (2003) found that in the Asia-Pacific region there is a distinct lack of trained teachers in state schools. In fact, the quality of English language in the public schools was so poor, that the majority of children with good English were those whose parents were able to send them to private classes (Nunan, 2003; Hu, 2007).
- ***Lack of specialist teachers in MFL.*** Much has been written about the shortage of qualified foreign language teachers (Nunan, 2003; Guthrie, 2005; East, 2007; Woodgate-Jones, 2008). Hu (2007) examined the formulation of China's foreign language policy for English in primary education. The author notes that there was a shortage of English teachers. He argues that to solve the teacher shortage problem, there was a training priority for teachers of other subjects who have some English and college graduates holding a non-education degree in English were encouraged to teach primary English. He concluded that the absence of stakeholder involvement in the policymaking process, heavy workloads, teachers' reluctance to teach English and lack of resources and training are factors that were

affecting English language teaching and that the quality of English language teachers was consequently poor.

Since there seems to be a need for foreign language teachers, it would seem appropriate to suggest that teacher education programmes are crucial to help MFL teachers develop the needed skills. In planning for these programmes, decisions, therefore, have to be made by policymakers. Richards et al. (2013) report on a one-year, part-time professional development programme that is implemented for non-specialists teachers who are interested in learning how to teach a foreign language in New Zealand. According to the authors, policymakers can offer professional development programme courses for non-specialist teachers. They also advised that in addition to the development of pedagogical skills, during the course teachers' language development needs to take place. Furthermore, they must continue to develop their language proficiency beyond the course (e.g. study abroad) until an applicable level of efficiency in the target language is achieved.

When teachers of foreign languages in primary schools are non-specialists (as in the case of England), Sharpe (2001:132) emphasises four main objectives that should be implemented within in-service training. Firstly, teachers should acquire secure knowledge of the basic structures and vocabulary to underpin: (a) effective real use of the MFL in routine events in the classroom, (b) teaching of linguistic elements within a planned scheme of work. Secondly, they must develop a rudimentary knowledge of the underpinning target language culture. Thirdly, teachers must develop enthusiastic attitude towards MFL teaching/learning. Finally, they should be able to apply known principles of good primary pedagogy to MFL. In addition to the objectives identified by Sharpe (2001), Jones and Coffey (2013) stress the importance of confidence to use the language, adoption of the methodology appropriate to the age range, the effective use of resources, and finally the use of communication skills. In fact, these objectives should receive a major focus in in-service training programmes to help both specialist and not specialist MFL primary school teachers.

While investments such as funding for courses and materials and having specialist primary MFL teachers are critical to the success and quality of English language teaching, the professional development programmes for MFL teachers are also crucial in order to provide teachers with needed knowledge and skills. However, it is not surprising that failures in these investments can affect training programmes. The studies below indicate that when investment is inadequate, courses can be ineffective.

- ***Inadequate training of teachers.*** Even when courses are in place, they do not necessarily meet teachers' needs in terms of subject knowledge and PCK. Often they are not long enough or there is a misalignment between course content and policy goals. For example, Garton's (2014) study in Korea found that although a number of positive, professional development courses were implemented, training in new teaching methodologies and low language proficiency continued to be of concern. Furthermore, teachers struggled to implement what they had learnt due to large class sizes. The lack of experience and training in MFL methodology was also found by Karavas (2014) to be an issue in Greece. Uysal's (2012) study located in Turkey, established shortcomings in a training programme that was isolated from the curriculum and real classroom situations. Furthermore, it neither involved teachers in the creation of materials nor provided opportunities to participate in the learning experience. In addition, participants cited a lack of resources and time.

An Indonesian study found that course duration, lack of resources and insufficient attention to L2 pedagogy were found to be problematic (Wati, 2011). In another study, Meng and Tajaroensuk (2013) investigated problems of EFL teachers in China. They found that the training programmes were delivered during the summer or winter holidays in other cities and were short-term lasting only two or three days. Meng and Tajaroensuk (2013) also found that it was not possible for many teachers to attend due to already existing heavy workloads. Additionally, heavy

teaching and administrative workload in schools may not motivate teachers to attend training (Sandholtz, 2002).

In the light of the above, a key issue that arises from the findings is misalignment between policy goals and course content. On the one hand, MFL have been introduced as a compulsory subject in primary schools but on the other, there have been inadequate attempts in preparing and developing teachers' understanding, knowledge, and skills in the field of languages. Hu (2007:367) advised that 'To ensure that the implementation goal can be achieved as scheduled, short-term and long-term plans for teacher development and training should get underway'. This suggests that planning for these programmes should be a top priority for policymakers to limit the gap between their goals and their expectation in preparing high-quality MFL teachers. Uysal (2012) also noted that one of the major issues in running a training programme is that it is well organised and planned.

Another issue in the area of the training programme is the effectiveness of the training. While research studies about effective professional development is lacking, this study referred to Guskey's (2003) report. After examining 13 recent lists of characteristics of 'effective professional development', Guskey (2003) discovered a weakness in the criteria for 'effectiveness'. According to him, the challenge revolved around 'yes, but . . .' statements where guidance about improvement efforts did not occur and the focus was only on simple answers to the questions about effective professional development. For him sharing with colleagues good practices that are held by some teachers '...might provide a basis for highly effective professional development' (p. 750). In training programmes literature, studies are based directly upon benefits and challenges with these programmes, there is little research for 'follow up' in MFL. This is an important issue for future research.

2.2.9 In-Service Training and Teacher Professionalism

To promote professionalism, it is important to note that policymakers and governments should invest the necessary resources into teacher education (Connell, 2009) to develop standards and quality of practice (Hargreaves, 1997). Furthermore, research suggests that teachers wish to be active participants in their own professional development who have agency while attending training programmes. Teachers' participation is seen as their right, essential for their professionalism (Sandholtz, 2002). It is an opportunity for teachers to show that they can make decisions and it is a way of for example planning activities while attending educational programmes.

Storey's (2009) paper presents data through survey and interviews with primary and secondary schools across England. Survey evidence suggested that teachers continue their professional development in terms of attending and listening to lectures or presentations, however, teachers mentioned that opportunities for discussion or problem-solving activities in seminars or workshops were rare. This suggests that teachers prefer to be active participants that interact in decision-making and problem-solving while attending professional development courses.

Storey (2009) also reported that teachers had concerns about the way training was disseminated using a cascade model. Teachers attending training sessions then cascade the information to colleagues who were not present by running in further training programmes covering the same content (Kennedy, 2014). Although the cascade model is popular due to ease of implementation and administration, participants noted that its effectiveness was highly dependent on the motivation, skills and ability of those cascading the training, with the result that many found the sessions unsatisfactory (Storey, 2009). Elder (1996) also stressed the need for some requirements to avoid cascade model failure. According to him, this training can be successful for the following reasons:

- 1) the selected people to pass on the training should be the best;
- 2) prepare the best materials (e.g. tools, aids, content and techniques;
- 3) provide adequate time to cover all the materials and to deliver the training in an interesting way;
- 4) the ability to evaluate and monitor, to ensure the understanding of the information;
- 5) choose the right employees representing the various sectors of the Ministry of Education e.g. teacher trainers, curriculum officers, and members of the field staff to enhance equality.

Elder (1996:15) concluded that ‘...establishment of a national team responsible for all aspects of training is essential for cascade model success. The cascade model is the most common method of providing professional development within the Omani context.

The research studies conducted by Kwakman (2003) and Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) affirms that co-operation with colleagues is important for engaging teachers in exchanging feedback and new information. Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) in their preliminary analysis investigating the professional development of primary and secondary teachers across England found longer-term professional development activities made changes to one or more aspects of teaching practice. They also found that the most important long-term professional development had to do with observing colleagues and sharing practice. The US Department of Education (1999) also highlighted the notion that collaborative activities between colleagues are more helpful for professional development and as Rizvi and Elliot (2005) argued, they can enhance teacher professionalism. This serves as evidence that working in co-operation with colleagues is a form of professional development that can improve teaching practices. Shah, Mahmood, and Hussain (2011) argued that working with a collaborative team of various educational organisations is also essential for in-service training success as well as the improvements in teachers’ knowledge and skills.

Another aspect of research in teachers' professional development, which has received increased attention, is 'action research', where teachers look and reflect on their own work to improve their actions (McNiff, 2010). Engagement in action research can enhance professionalism as argued by Winch and Foreman-Peck (2000) because this process involves critical reflection on teachers' actions, e.g. pedagogic processes (ibid).

While the role of policymakers in defining teachers' professionalism has been the focus of a significant body of discussion, much less attention has been paid to how teachers themselves understand and view their professionalism. Swann et al. (2010) argued that policymakers in developing the concept of 'professionalism' are defining it in terms of their own criteria, telling teachers what they should do and even about how to think about the term in their work. The authors suggested that it is important to explore teachers' own thinking and understanding about their professionalism.

In their study, focusing on teachers' perceptions of their professionalism under conditions of educational reforms in government primary schools in Karachi, Pakistan, Rizvi and Elliot (2005) identified teachers' perspectives about professionalism under four areas:

1. **Teacher efficacy:** teachers' belief in their abilities to show high classroom teaching efficacy.
2. **Teacher practice:** teachers recognise their responsibilities with a commitment to work responsibly and to maintain good relationships with their pupils.
3. **Teacher collaboration:** teachers feel collaboration work with others in planning and teaching is important for their professionalism.
4. **Teacher leadership:** opportunities to make classroom decisions e.g. choosing their teaching methods and undertaking some leadership roles in the school are significant in enhancing their professionalism.

The findings confirm that teachers seemed to think about professionalism in terms of doing their work effectively and their abilities in making decisions in their schools. Collaboration work also seems an important component of their professionalism. Although it may argue that professionalism is understood differently by policymakers and teachers; they have two common criteria, teachers' quality and raising students' learning.

Phelps (2003) also describes teachers' professionalism in terms of being committed to student learning, teachers' input of new information and to interact with students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and community participants. It is important to note that teachers should participate within local and professional groups and communities to learn from each other via 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

2.2.10 Community of Practice

A 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003; Fuller et al., 2005) within the field of teacher education has benefits in building trust and respect across a range of educational organisations. A 'community of practice' is a social learning organisation where groups of staff members meet regularly to share a concern or a passion for something as they interact with each other (Wenger, 2010). It is about sharing practice and being an active participant rather than being a passive recipient. Members of this community find value in their gatherings due to exchanging information in order to achieve the specific objectives relating to the work they have to perform (Du Plessis, 2008).

The aim of this gathering is to gain knowledge through the process of sharing experiences with the group related to the same field (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and to achieve the same goal. According to Wenger (2010), it is about making sense of one's system and his position in that system which can lead to relationships of identification

that extends across the whole system. Wenger identified 3 modes of identification: *engagement*, *imagination* and *alignment*. All modes work inside practices and through boundaries. *Engagement* is connected to a practice that refers to engaging in doing things, working together and talking. *Imagination* refers to creating an image after engaging with the world and can feel the sense of belonging. *Alignment* means individual engagement in practice may be affected without some degree of uniformity, e.g. setting the goal of an organisation.

To take the example of Education, according to Wenger (2011) 'communities of practice' appear to be in teacher training where administrators meet with colleagues from schools and districts. To take the example of the Omani system, in teacher training programmes members from various organisations interact e.g. curriculum department, trainers, supervisors, senior teachers and teachers. According to Wenger (2011), 'communities of practice' are places where participants need to see the value and the outcomes of their engagement and to get something out of it. It must be argued that although teacher-training programmes are widely known as a place where participants from different backgrounds can meet, if this organisation lacks relevance, or does not meet participants' needs, they will not take part. This suggests that without acknowledging teachers' needs and inappropriate plans in training programmes, they will not bother to attend as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

Communities of practice are beneficial for professional learning because teachers can have roles in sharing and exchanging their knowledge and in decision-making while attending training programmes or any educational meetings. Such communities also respect teacher professionalism. Moreover, they can improve positive community relationships e.g. between teachers, supervisors, trainers and policymakers. Finally, working in this way, communities of practice may reduce misalignment between policymakers' goals and teachers' needs and can lead to the impact they expect.

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced teacher training in terms of pre-service and in-service training programmes. We have learnt that it is not just the existence of training that counts, but the importance of well-designed training programmes (Uysal, 2012). Much of the discussion for pre-service training programmes, focuses on the significance of the practical experience, where pre-service teachers can deal directly with classroom experience and receive guidance.

When designing a professional development programme for in-service teachers, on the one hand, the syllabus should be designed according to teachers' needs in terms of subject knowledge and PCK, and it should be well organised and planned on the other (Wati, 2011).

Furthermore, we have learned in section 2.2.4 that teachers enter training programmes with previous experiences, beliefs and personal values that inform their knowledge about teaching. These continue to be shaped and moulded by professional experience (Kelchtermans, 2009) and consistently shape their practices in their classrooms (Freeman and Richards, 1996). It is important that pre-service and in-service programmes recognise these appropriately to help teachers improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning for which they are responsible in schools (Hagger and McIntyre, 2000).

This section has also intended to show that educational training programmes appear to be most effective for teachers' 'professional development' if all the discussed themes are well implemented and if 'the goals of the policy and therefore the criteria for success are clarified in the minds of policymakers, and there is some agreement about that among educational developers and others involved in its implementation' (Trowler, 2005:12).

The issue of teachers' professionalism is also fundamental. Teachers' professionalism can be viewed as 'becoming a certain person—a knower in a context where what it means to know is negotiated with respect to the regime of competence of a community' (Wengers, 2010:2). McCulloch, Helsby, and Knight (2000) identify the teacher's role within the curriculum domain to be also a key source of teachers' professionalism. This implies an important role in curriculum development. Curriculum development will be the focus of the next section.

2.3 Curriculum Reform and Development

Curriculum reform, as March (2004:261) noted, is 'a fundamental reworking of what knowledge is valued in the curriculum, how that knowledge is made available, for example, its placement on timetabling lines and competition with other subjects and how it is taught'. Fullan (2007) affirmed that curriculum reform involves changes in practice in various aspects of classrooms, schools and districts and these changes have to occur along three components in implementing a new programme or policy in order for change to achieve its specific educational goals and to produce the planned outcomes. These components are *the use of new or revised material* (e.g. curriculum materials and technology); *the use of new teaching strategies*; and *the possible change in pedagogical assumptions and theories under new policy or programme*. It is important to note that March's (2004) definition points to the macro level, whereas Fullan (2007) conceptualised it with regards to the micro level in schools and classrooms.

This chapter explores influences on and issues related to curriculum reform and development. The review will demonstrate that these are both political and educational macro levels. This is exemplified in a statement published on the Oman Educational Portal (2011) which explains that the country's curriculum reform has been driven by Islamic and cultural beliefs, a concern with literacy in Arabic, and economic issues to

prepare learners for the labour market. Here we notice different drivers or 'voices': (1) the 'political voice' from the government focusing on economic issues and (2) the 'Islamic and cultural voice'. Notably absent here, however, is the 'pedagogy voice' of teachers which is likely to be more concerned with educational issues.

There are two main sections of this final chapter of the literature review. The first one addresses political drivers. The second considers educational perspectives and how curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment are considered in order to alleviate tensions between the intended and implemented curriculum. This section also looks at the teachers' roles in curriculum reform in particular with reference to research studies that have looked at challenges of curriculum implementation.

As the chapter will demonstrate, policymakers often pay more attention to economic and political issues rather than pedagogy, which can result in curriculum reform failure. As March (2004) argued that curriculum modification had not always led to better learning outcomes and in some cases, has even brought another turn in the search for successful education. It is perhaps worth noting that whilst many countries pay much attention to their schooling reforms, they do not always result in higher quality of education. Notably, political, social economic, technological and educational forces shape the policy (Hu, 2007). These issues discussed in the following section.

2.3.1 Political and Economic Perspectives

Gruba et al. (2004) and Seikkula-Leino (2011) argued that curriculum reform is commonly driven by values as well as by politics, individuals, social and cultural needs. However, political drivers have been seen as something that can influence and undermine curriculum reform (Bruniges, 2005; Wyse et al., 2012). Day (2002) emphasised that there are common factors, which drive countries to reform their school curriculum: pressure to raise standards of performance; ensuring social cohesion and

maintaining personal and social values; and challenging teachers' existing practices. However, they can result in increasing the workload for teachers; and not paying attention to teachers' commitment and identities (ibid). Similarly, other studies of attempted curriculum reform failures show that political influences can have a significantly negative impact on curriculum reform and can be a reason that it may fail. Examining curriculum reform in South Africa, for example, Jansen (1998) predicted that the 'Outcomes-based ' curriculum would fail since it was driven by political issues (e.g. apartheid schooling needs) and did not serve the classroom issues. He critiqued the inaccessible and complex language of the curriculum reform where teachers rarely can acknowledge the meaning through their classroom practices.

Roberts (1998) also pointed to political influences (neoliberal thought) on curriculum reform in New Zealand in literary studies and other subjects. He stated that meddling of politicians in the curriculum 'amounts to nothing less than a colonisation of students' minds – a deliberate disavowal of all that was once regarded important and precious in a good educational environment in favour of a misguided and destructive form of political fadism' (p. 36).

Nkyabonaki (2013) argued that curricula and teaching in Tanzania have been controlled at the macro state political level, the micro-community political level and at the religious institutional level. According to his findings, the political ideology of 'the survival of the fittest' (p. 115) has been placed at the heart of the curriculum. He also argues that macro and micro politics play a part in hiring teachers, funding schools and other educational institutions, and in the examination system. He highlights the use of Swahili as the sole language for assessments, the lack of teacher involvement in marking assessments, and the absence of any information received by candidates or teachers for the reasons for failure in the national examinations.

If teachers have no involvement in the assessment process or access to information concerning student outcomes, they cannot take steps to target areas of low achievement in the curriculum to improve subsequent teaching and learning. The

above examples suggest that if the curriculum's roots are political, then the concern is that the real goal of education is neglected. It is important to note that political drivers can steer away from learners' needs, especially when the focus is on the modern economic needs.

In recent years, modern economics created changes and challenges within the educational field. Much of this arises in the introduction of MFL and the use of ICT in schools. Oman is one of the countries that have introduced curriculum reform to equip students with the skills, information and attitudes that Oman's youth needs to achieve in this rapidly changing community (Ministry of Education, 2013) and to prepare them for work under the new circumstances created by the global economy and to encourage them to engage in lifelong learning (Ministry of Education, 2007). The ministry also stresses the role of English in continuing technological and economic development and promoting world knowledge.

However, it is important to note here that the MFL curriculum reform compared with other subjects is driven by worries about the economy and a global market. More specifically, it seems that even children, not just policymakers are concerned with the economic benefits of learning English. For example, Nagy (2009) explored the opinions of 10-11 years-old children in Budapest about learning English as an MFL, and found that those children learn English to pass the placement exams for a place in university and to find a good job in the future. According to Nagy (2009), the children's responses revealed their instrumental focus rather than to know and learn English as a second language.

As the focus on MFL has grown, so has the introduction of ICT in schools. In their study, Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2012) analysed eight frameworks describing 21st-century competencies and found that ICT is at the core of each of the frameworks. Bruniges (2005) argued that to prepare learners to use technology, policy-makers task is to provide the opportunities for all learners to learn and develop the new skills of dealing with technology to prepare them for the future.

The task to provide children and young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for their present and future lives is essential (Wiles, 2009) as is the challenge to better manage curriculum reform to support teachers with the implementation processes. The following section will address educational perspectives which like political drivers, moved away from a focus on both students' and teachers' needs.

2.3.2 Educational Perspectives

Educational perspectives' role is a chain of decision-making and implementation from the macro or national level to the micro level in schools and classrooms. Their roles in a school level refer to planning and developing the curriculum as well as offering professional development training for teachers. Without adequate attention to these areas, educational outcomes will not improve, rather they will have a negative influence on the curriculum. Understanding the term 'curriculum', and its planning process are the focus of this section.

2.3.2.1 Educational Conceptualisations of the Curriculum

Historically, the term 'curriculum' has been understood as subjects, time assigned to these subjects, and when the students will take these subjects (Kelting-Gibson, 2013). Holt (1980) argued that curriculum is not just the total of its subjects, but a coherent group of experiences structured over a particular period. A number of authors who present their theories and designs further illustrate the definition of this term. For example, Nias, Southworth and Campbell (1992) found that to teachers, curriculum meant children's learning. They also found that there were no differences in their perceptions of curriculum and classroom practice. They came to the conclusion that curriculum is whatever activities are done by teachers in the classroom, and it is their responsibility to make choices. Webster (1993) argued that curriculum is all scheduled

school activities, besides organised clubs, athletics and dramatics. This definition is broader and refers to schools' extracurricular activities. Other researchers claimed that curriculum is a combination of the 'content' of children's learning, the 'pedagogy', e.g. the arrangement of the learning, and 'assessment' of learner achievement (McDonald and Van Der Horest, 2007; Farah and Ridge, 2009; Cockburn and Handscomb, 2012).

As the literature shows, the meaning of curriculum differs greatly among educationists. This suggests as Egan (2003) claims, that there are no clear logical boundaries for the curriculum; it is debatable whether it should include instruction, achieving restricted objectives, all learning experiences, or evaluation of learners' achievement. This suggests that defining 'curriculum' is not an easy task as Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2009) argued '...defining the concept of curriculum is perhaps the most difficult of all, for the term curriculum has been used with quite different meanings ever since the field took the form' (p. 2).

Nonetheless, in spite of a variety of interpretations, there are some commonalities. Broadly speaking, these include *planning*, e.g. objectives, content, activities, *pedagogy*, e.g. the organisation of teaching and learning and finally *assessment*, e.g. learning outcomes (Wiles, 2009). In relation to my understanding, these areas represent important pillars of the curriculum and need serious consideration while developing and reforming a curriculum. In the following discussion, the researcher will review these pillars.

2.3.3 Curriculum Planning and Development

Curriculum planning is an important step of mapping out its proposed journey. To understand the ideas and insights of curriculum planning, it is worth looking at different educationalists over the decades. Tyler (1949:20) suggested four basic questions curriculum developers need to answer when developing or planning a curriculum:

- 1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
- 2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
- 3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organised?
- 4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

Tyler's (1949) work, referred to as an 'objective model' emphasises consistency among objectives, learning experiences, and outcomes. In other words, he emphasised the purposes of the school, educational experiences related to purposes, an organisation of experiences, and evaluation of purposes. This model is still used for curriculum development in some countries (see Jansen, 1998; Nkyabonaki, 2013).

Gallagher and Wyse (2013) point out that when creating any curriculum, it is essential to not only consider the overall key aims and objectives but also their impact on the teachers and learners. The author's question 'objectives-led teaching approach' where the focus of the lesson is driven by specific learning objectives. According to this approach, the lesson objectives are written on the board and then discussed and clarified with the learners. This approach is the most common practice in the UK primary schooling and elsewhere. Gallagher and Wyse (2013) regard Tyler's (1949) model as belonging to this approach and proceed to question its effectiveness and appropriateness. Tyler (1949) believed that the curriculum should be set out as a sequence of objectives that then inform instruction. However, as Kelly (2009) argued, this can result in lesson content being selected largely to fulfil a purpose rather than for its quality, relevance to student interests, or overall educational value. Gallagher and Wyse (2013) also critique the model for neglecting the value of the learner's voice in establishing aims for their education.

Similarly, as early as 1935, (Caswell and Campbell in Kelting-Gibson, 2013:45) appropriateness of pedagogy for the students and suggested that the following process should be adhered to when developing a curriculum: (1) 'state the principles presumed to guide the development of the curriculum, (2) determine the educational

aims, (3) establish the scope of the curriculum, (4) determine the student purposes, (5) set up activities for realization of purposes, (6) select subject matter, (7) decide on the grade placement and time allotment of presenting materials, (8) choose teaching procedures, (9) evaluate the outcomes of instruction, and (10) organise instruction'.

Nevertheless, curriculum planning can also take other forms, for example, planning and writing the textbooks. The writing of textbooks requires a range of capacities that include academic and research inputs, understanding of children's developmental levels, effective skills of communication and design (NCERT, 2007).

The focus on pedagogy is also important because it refers to different teaching strategies and learning styles used by teachers for building a bridge between the students and the curriculum (Baumfield, 2013).

Clearly, with the significance of pedagogy, there is an emphasis on the assessment. Hayward (2013) refers to 'the learning triangle', which presents a unique relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and more importantly; that learners and learning are at the centre of the process. According to him 'If curriculum defines what is to be learned and pedagogy describes how learning takes place then the role of assessment is to gather evidence to support learning and to allow all to discern the extent to which learning is taking place' Hayward (2013:60).

Hayward (2013) believed that assessment could be influenced and negatively understood if it is used for several purposes. If teachers are judged by test results, they will teach to the test (ibid). Watermeyer (2011) advised that there should be a match between what occurs in the test and in the classroom. Based on their reviews of nine published studies on teacher design teams, Voogt et al. (2011) found that because teachers' performance was gauged in relation to exam achievements rather than adherence to the curriculum, they modified the curriculum to focus on the assessments. This means when teachers encounter judgements such as results of tests about their teaching, this could affect the implementation of the curriculum. The

danger as Kelly (2009) stated is that assessment is not supporting the curriculum, rather leading it.

As far as Richards (2003) who looks specifically at curriculum planning in a foreign language is even less concerned with aims and his starting point is 'input' or linguistic content, he then goes on to consider the sequence and organisation of content in terms of usefulness, learnability, frequency, simplicity, and authenticity. Kelly (2009) also argued that the content of what information to learn in the school is a crucial element in curriculum planning. Following this Richards (2003) focuses on 'process' that refers to classroom activities, materials, procedures, techniques, and resources used by teachers to support learning. Finally, he refers to learning outcomes about assessing the performance of the learners.

Perhaps the most important conclusion from the above discussion is the shift in process of curriculum planning and development in teaching and learning assessment procedure and how they interrelate. Pedagogy and content are important issues to consider in curriculum planning. It might be useful to note again that 'the learning triangle' curriculum, pedagogy and assessment discussed earlier by Hayward (2013) are connected and need to be put in place. This suggests there should be alignment between what is written in the curriculum, taught in the classroom, and tested. If these connections are missing, problems can arise with the implementation and curriculum failure is possible. This is the focus of the following section.

2.3.4 Tensions between the Intended and Implemented Curricula

The '*intended curriculum*' is the curriculum produced by the curriculum makers; the '*implemented curriculum*' refers to what teachers teach in the classroom and comprises classroom activities (Lui and Leung, 2013). The '*written curriculum*' articulates concepts, skills, attitudes and values that help teachers to accomplish

curricular objectives. The written curriculum is a primary tool for teachers (Castro Superfine, Marshall and Kelso, 2015) to support the intended instructional programme of a school. According to Castro Superfine, Marshall and Kelso (2015:165) 'The nature of the instructional information provided in written curriculum materials is particularly important to consider when examining how and the extent to which a curriculum programme is implemented as intended'. It is important to understand that although the written curriculum represents goals to be achieved, a list of objectives to be mastered, and the type of materials to be used (Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead, 2012) this does not necessarily make the written curriculum more likely to be implemented. For example, teachers' inadequate understanding of the pedagogy issues and if the reform is overly prescriptive leaving teachers with little flexibility to use their professional judgements. In their analysis of curricular regulation in Argentina, Gvirtz and Beech (2004) found that all teachers were obligated to use prescribed textbooks in schools.

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) pointed to the importance of close relationships between different aspects of curriculum, and Gvirtz and Beech (2004) referred to necessary elements of curricular regulation to support a teaching community with curriculum implementation. Indeed, the discussion in Chapter 5 (section 5.2 in particular) is based on the ideas of Gvirtz and Beech (2004) regarding 'instruments of curricula regulation' and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead's (2012) ideas about the interrelatedness of 'different aspects of curriculum' in order to theorise the main findings of the research.

Gvirtz and Beech (2004) discovered that supervisors controlled teachers' work allowing hardly any room for curricular adaptations by schools or teachers. These findings are in accord with some studies arguing that supervisors have a controlling role that consists in the first instance of the description of 'compliance controlling' De Grauwe (2007). Exploring supervisors' official job description in, India, Trinidad and Tabago and Tanzania, De Grauwe (2007:3) found that, in addition, to controlling role, supervisors have two other roles, providing guidance and assistance for teachers to

improve classroom practices and working as a liaison agent between the education system and the school administration. From De Grauwe's perspective, controlling role is still used today in many countries. This situation can lead to insufficient instructional supervision (Ritz and Cashell, 1980; Sharma et al., 2011) and lack of relationship between teachers and their supervisors.

Findings by Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) were similar. They presented findings of the perspectives of 114 elementary and secondary teachers which showed a negative relationship between teachers and their supervisors, and supervisors were not offering valuable support. Sharma et al. (2011) also in their study that was carried out in India, Malaysia and Thailand found supervisors visiting schools to find mistakes rather than to improve teachers' performances.

Although supervisors were considered to be the best source of information (Foehrenback and Goldfarb, 1990) but it seems their roles tended to be carried out in controlled judgment rather than supporting. Engin (2012) argued that supervisors' roles also included feedback interaction. He talked about the value of supervisor–teacher feedback interaction that focused on listening and respecting the views of others. According to him, it is a process of explaining, justification, responding to questions, and making decisions about teaching.

Gender can also be an issue. Williams and Locke (1999) did a study to better understand the role of gender in supervisor-subordinate mentoring relationships and found that female supervisors with female subordinates received significantly less support and mentoring. According to these findings, there is no doubt that curricular regulation is affected by educational influences.

Political and educational forces are seen as shaping the policy and tend to adapt the education system according to that structure. The problem with this highly prescribed written curriculum is that it does not pay attention to those are charged with its implementation. The policymakers seem to be assuming teachers' understanding of

pedagogy and assessment issues. When these issues and teacher development to support curriculum implementation are overlooked, teachers tend to interpret and implement the curriculum in idiosyncratic ways (Peiser and Jones, 2014).

In the context of the Omani education system, the written curriculum is also heavily prescriptive. However, in addition to pedagogy and assessment challenges as will be explained more fully in section 4.2.2, teachers also face problems with the supervision system. For example, teachers are rarely permitted to make curricular adaptations as they have to follow the written curriculum, e.g. the teacher's book step by step. The role of the teacher's book (that is supposed to provide support material for the teachers) can have a negative impact on the implementation of the curriculum. If teachers disagree with the content, they may change, neglect or adapt the reform when supervisors are not in the schools.

In section (2.2.8), we saw that the inadequate training of teachers and lack of funding for courses and materials have been a concern and have had an impact on teachers' practices in primary classrooms. The above studies also draw attention to the failure of those responsible for reforming the curriculum. El-Okda (2005) and Hu (2007) referred to a 'top-down approach' in formulating a school curriculum where stakeholders such as teachers may not be sufficiently engaged within the process of curriculum design and development, which can result in its failure. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.3.5 Teachers' Roles in Curriculum Reform

According to Wang (2008) and Voogt et al. (2011), the importance of teachers' roles in curriculum reform is seen as critical. As Voogt et al. (2011) explain in collaboration with each other, e.g. teachers, educational researchers, educational design experts, can share practice, create new or adapt existing curriculum materials. This way of working

has been discussed in section 2.2.10 as a 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). With teachers' involvement and cooperation in planning, they are more likely to assume responsibility for the curriculum (Brain et al., 2006) and indeed without their commitment and involvements, implementation of the reform is likely to be incomplete and may be inadequate. Datnow and Castellano (2000) affirmed that teachers who find that their ideas are consistent with the reform support the change. In other words, teachers' participation in decisions about curriculum design increases their commitment.

In their study investigating how teachers' responses have affected the implementation of new reform in two Californian/elementary schools, Datnow and Castellano (2000) found that almost all teachers, whether supporters or those who just accepted the reform, made adaptations to the reform and complained about its development by an outside group. The authors concluded that teachers tend to be reluctant to change due to the fact that both schools were positioned in communities that tended to resist constraints on freedom. It seems that the point about teachers' beliefs discussed in section 2.2.4 and the location of the schools are crucial with regard to reform acceptance or rejection.

In another study, Banegas (2011) was approached to develop English as a foreign language (EFL) curriculum reform in Chubut, Argentina. He developed a programme based on teachers' suggestions about the contents, what methodologies to follow to teach the contents, methods, materials, assessment and evaluation based on teachers' own classroom practices. Banegas (2011) established that teachers emphasised the fact that the previous curriculum was something forced, and that it did not deserve their adherence. This suggests that if teachers participate in decision-making, they are likely to support the implementation of a reform (Wang and Cheng, 2008). Banegas (2011) believed that with any educational reform, both authorities and teachers should be jointly responsible so that 'teachers do not feel the imposition of a reform is alien to them' (p. 430). These above examples suggest that teachers who supported the reform were those who were involved throughout the planning process.

Although the above studies represent the importance of teachers' being involved in curriculum development, others suggest reasons why teachers' contributions might not be appropriate in the planning process. Fullan (2007) argued that people become involved in change voluntarily or involuntarily and the danger is that they do not necessarily understand the nature of educational change. According to Handler (2010), teachers should only be in this position, i.e. curriculum decision-making, if they have the required knowledge. Handler (2010) argued that to communicate knowledge to the learners, teachers must have a comprehensive understanding of their content areas and methods. He claimed that teachers have more knowledge of instructional and evaluation methodologies to achieve classroom curricular than knowledge in the other requisite areas, e.g. curriculum development.

Handler (2010) postulated from his research that teachers lack the required knowledge to take curricular leadership roles, to be designers of curricula and to make decisions beyond the classroom level. According to him, teachers need to have a universal understanding of education, understanding of the relevance of assessment data and instructional design, understanding of education as a social and political enterprise, understanding of instructional practice and the pragmatics of curricular planning. To help teachers meet these expectations and the required theoretical knowledge, teacher-training programmes must be restructured (ibid).

2.3.6 Challenges of Curriculum Implementation

It is worth noting that in designing or reforming new curricula, teachers need to be informed and trained about the new structured body of knowledge. Wiles (2009) noted that the focus of the developed curriculum is to improve teaching; therefore, teachers need to know new knowledge, skill methods to improve learning outcomes; however, without their understanding, it is more likely that teachers fail to implement the curriculum. This section looks at examples around the world about why teachers face

challenges in implementing curriculum reform. The examples point again to problems with policymakers' perspectives and implementations. In China's recent reform, for example, Feng (2006) pointed out that, although the recent curriculum was issued after preparation and review, there are still problems to solve. He identified problems related to curriculum standards, teachers' workloads, students' interest, and the adoption of western leadership styles. Garton (2014), in his study investigating the situation in teaching the English language curriculum to young learners in South Korea, identified four components of failure related to: 1) *implementation of Policymakers*: e.g. teachers need more training. 2) *Implementation of the curriculum*: a shortage of time, e.g. teachers have to hurry to deliver strictly prescribed curriculum content. 3) *Methods*: teachers used more traditional equipment (e.g. paper and crayons) and the listening to a CD or tape recorder due to lack of confidence in teachers' own use of English. 4) *Too many students in one class*.

De Segovia and Hardison (2009) likewise found in their investigation about the English curriculum reform in Thailand that in addition to insufficient training and inadequate resources, there is a gap between curriculum policy and classroom practice, e.g. the shift from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred approach (discussed earlier in 2.1.3). Lo, Kim and McCrory (2008) in their study with two teaching assistants found that although teachers used the written curriculum for planning, classroom management and for their own learning, they did not teach all the main ideas in the textbook, and they modified and skipped some content due to shortage of time and administrative stresses.

As emphasised in section 2.3.1 by Day (2002) curriculum reform is at risk of increasing workload for teachers and does not necessarily pay attention to teachers' commitments and identities. Fullan (2007) argued that there are four factors which can affect the implementation and sustainability of curriculum change or reform: need, clarity, complexity and quality. *Need* refers to failures of examining priority needs, e.g. schools' needs/teacher's needs. As Holt (1980) and Richards (2001) argued, individual countries often overlook schools' needs and learners' needs. *Clarity* refers to unclear

goals, e.g. teachers do not know what they should do differently. *Complexity* refers to the difficulty of skills required; teaching strategies and the use of materials (see Jansen, 1998). Quality refers to careful consideration in the decision-making process. Wiles (2009) also attempted to refer to four factors for curriculum failure: *analyse*, where there is no clear plan. *Design* refers to a lack of thoughtful consideration in designing the curriculum. *Implement* refers to the same factor that Fullan's (2007) defined as complexity. *Evaluation* refers to no trusted, accurate resources to evaluate the curriculum process.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored two important themes 'political drivers' and 'educational perspectives' within the area of curriculum reform. We saw how both of these can affect curricula implementation. The analysis has shown that it is highly unlikely that curriculum development will be effective without clear consideration of the planning process. In this process, economic issues such as globalisation should be considered in order to serve students' needs in their lives in the future. However, we have also seen how important it is to involve teachers in the reform process as they are the implementers of the curriculum, and they can resist change if their voices are neglected. However, the literature suggests that teachers need to understand and to have the knowledge necessary for the introduction of educational change, to be involved in curriculum development, as Fullan (2007) and Handler (2010) suggested. Finally, teacher training and development programmes need to accompany curriculum reform as we saw that lack of expertise in pedagogy and assessment can make it very difficult for teachers to carry out their roles effectively.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

This chapter presents a justification for the methodological approach and methods adopted in order to answer four broad questions. The questions relate to theoretical issues and operational issues at both the macro and micro levels. The question relating to the macro level explores what the curriculum department does to support teachers in the implementation of curriculum reform. The questions relating to the micro level are concerned with primary English teachers' experiences of curriculum implementation, in addition to those of the children (and their parents) at whom it is targeted, and the perspectives of those involved in teacher training. As detailed in the introduction, these questions are:

1. What are the theoretical principles that need to be taken into account when modifying or designing the English curriculum for primary-aged children?
2. What are the key considerations of Omani policymakers in designing the English as a modern foreign language curriculum?
3. A. What opportunities and challenges did the teachers experience in the recent curriculum reform?
3. B. What do the trainers and supervisors think should be considered in the development and delivery of the English curriculum?
4. What are the perspectives of students and parents with regard to learning English as a modern foreign language?

The adopted research approach taken in this study is predominantly a qualitative one, but one aspect of the research will use a survey with the collection of some quantitative

data. Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that qualitative methods aim to understand experiences and attitudes from the perspective of social life as well as to answer questions about the 'what' 'why' and 'how'. In the case of this study, looking back at the research questions, I wish to investigate 'what' problems and challenges teachers and students face with regard to the teaching and learning of English as an MFL.

In the introduction of this thesis, I set out my rationale for the area of investigation. As a curriculum officer working with developing English curriculum materials, I want to explore what positive aspects of the reform as well as what new topics were interesting for both teachers and learners and to familiarise myself with new challenges in the curriculum reform. As Gray (2009) argued, in exploratory research, the researcher ought to know more about a phenomenon and to ask questions to explore what is happening. Since a major goal of this research is to understand the current problems with the English primary curriculum reform in Oman through the perspectives of teachers and other stakeholders, the study is exploratory (Hedgcock, 2002; Robson, 2002).

This chapter begins with a section outlining my ontological and epistemological position, and then discusses the research design, methods, sampling, ethical considerations, and data analysis. The chapter concludes by defending the trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 My Ontological Position

Arthur et al. (2012) argued that researchers need to understand that any research is framed by related assumptions and the researcher needs to ask questions related to ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods in order to enrich their ability to critique their own research position. The following discusses these assumptions with regard to my own position in more detail.

This research was conceived within the interpretive paradigm as I want to research teachers', students' and parents' ideas, perspectives, and views about the English curriculum as an MFL. Within an interpretive approach, the aim of the researcher, as Klein and Myers (1999) argued, is to understand peoples' thoughts, actions and perspectives under investigation. I am interested to understand how different people represent their views differently by concepts and words (Gray, 2009) as they have ideas about their world and what is going on around them (Robson, 2002). I believe that reality is multi-layered and complex (Cohen et al., 2013) and a single phenomenon has multiple interpretations. Policymakers and those supporting curriculum implementation, i.e. supervisors and trainers, are likely to have different views about curriculum reform to teachers, students and parents due to their different roles, responsibilities and backgrounds. I am interested in how the MFL curriculum reform is represented and described through different views of the participants. Arthur et al. (2012:16) argued that 'ontological positions can be seen to exist in a simplistic fashion along a continuum from left to right from realism to constructivism'. According to them, under realism, there is a singular objective reality, whereas constructivism has multiple realities that are constructed by individuals. This suggests that there are multiple perspectives as different people view things differently, depending on their experiences or background. In this way, individuals construct their own knowledge and many aspects of the world through interaction with other people, experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Knowledge is not discovered or found but is constructed (Bloomer, 2001) and it is personal (Fox, 2001). As our perceptions of the world are determined or influenced in different ways, there is no single objective reality true to all (Kivinen and Ristela, 2003).

As discussed earlier, this study was conceived within the interpretive paradigm and the principal approach is a qualitative research methodology aligned with constructivist ontology. As Krefting (1999:214) argues, 'subjective meanings and perceptions of the subject are critical in qualitative research, and it is the researcher's responsibility to access these'. As a constructivist, I understand that individuals have different interpretations and it is my role as a researcher to discover the multiple realities.

I understand that the discussion above about social reality from different perspectives may raise concerns about trustworthiness due to multiple realities, however, it is my responsibility to reveal realities as adequately as possible (Krefting, 1999), to investigate the present problems with the English primary curriculum reform. It is my job to represent those multiple realities from different perspectives according to their experiences to 'inform[ing] educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational action' (Bassey, 1999:39).

3.2 Methodological Approach

As argued earlier for the purpose of this research, it was decided that interpretivist research methods were to be used. However, some quantitative methods were also used in data collection vis-a-vis a survey. The purpose of selecting mixed methods (Arthur et al., 2012) is that both qualitative and quantitative can provide a better understanding of a research problem (Bulsara, 2015). According to Yin (2006), mixed methods are used for the purpose of enhancing the breadth and depth of understanding. In my endeavour to gain a better understanding of the challenges involved in the English primary curriculum reform in Oman through investigating a range of stakeholders' perspectives, I considered mixed methods as the most appropriate way to answer the research questions. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004:17) point out that the mixed method approach is 'creative', 'inclusive', and 'complementary' and can answer many research questions. They do suggest, however, that the researchers need to consider all of the related characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research to mix research in an effective manner. For example, Qualitative research is a method of inquiry employed in the social sciences to explore social and cultural phenomena (Myers, 2009) and to explore the meaning of peoples' experiences. In this approach, the researcher looks at attitudes, opinions, events, words and pictures to produce complete, detailed descriptions. A qualitative approach is also associated with some disadvantages, for example, the quantity of

data makes interpretation and analysis time-consuming. Furthermore, this approach cannot be applied across a large number of people. Therefore, it was important to use a quantitative approach to have an answer for my fourth question '*What are the perspectives of students and parents with regard to learning English as a modern foreign language?*' as this approach is useful in collecting a large amount of information from large numbers of participants (Burton and Bartlett, 2004). I was interested to allow for opinion and feedback from a large number of students and parents on their experience about English year 3 and 4 curriculum reform.

On the other hand, by using a quantitative approach with questionnaire I cannot have contact or hear the words of the students, therefore, the use of a qualitative approach would help to explore in more detail the survey findings and to integrate all data from both approaches in order to clarify a better understanding of the problem. Although the mixed methods approach may be criticised as it merges differing ontological and epistemological perspectives on the nature of reality (Day, Sammons, and Gu, 2008), I believe that neither method does everything e.g. quantitative methods deal with large samples, while qualitative methods deal with rich, in-depth, narrative description of sample.

A further advantage of mixed methods is that they can increase reliability and credibility through the triangulation of the different methods and data types (Bekhet and Zauszniewski, 2012). I believe that offering a statistical analysis, along with interviews makes the research more comprehensive about the specific challenges in the English curriculum reform. I also believe that both methods are valuable and can allow a variety of different viewpoints to emerge in order to have a complete understanding of this research problem.

3.3 Research Design and Methods

The study was designed in three distinct phases including a pilot study and phases 1 and 2. The following section discusses the design in more detail with reference also to the data collection instruments.

- **Pilot Study**

In the first instance, a pilot was set up involving two primary schools in which a questionnaire was given to Grade 3 and Grade 4 students (n=20). Open-ended, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with two teachers in each of the schools. The interview questions were provided for each teacher before the interview. The purpose of the pilot study was to (1) test the effectiveness of the instrument, (2) to make sure that the interview questions were understandable, relevant and not leading, (3) to know about the actual time needed for each interview and (4) to identify difficulties that might arise if the respondents in the main study were to use the questionnaire. It is important to note that there were minor amendments made to the questionnaire according to the feedback provided from the pilot study. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

- **Phases 1 and 2**

Phase 1 involved the collection of data from primary school children (n=250) in year 3 and 4, their parents (n=250) and English teachers (n=5) from five schools in the Muscat region. Due to time constraints, it was more practical to choose schools from one region, which were within easy travelling distance from my home.

Phase 2 was also comprised of primary school children ($n=250$) in year 3 and 4, and their parents ($n=250$) from the AL Dahira region. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with students enrolled in year 3 and 4 ($n=13$) from the Muscat region and the AL Dahira region. There were also three focus group interviews with English teachers ($n=15$) from the Muscat region, AL Sharqia South region, and the AL Dahira region (Figure 3.1 clearly illustrates the locations). The focus group interview data were supplemented with open-ended, semi-structured interviews with supervisors ($n=3$) and trainers ($n=3$) from the three regions. As I explained in Chapter 1, the role of the supervisor is to provide on-going guidance and support to the teachers and the role of the trainer is to run various training courses for teachers. Finally, policymakers ($n=2$) from Muscat region were also interviewed. The next part of the chapter will justify the research methods adopted in more detail and are presented in chronological order of use.

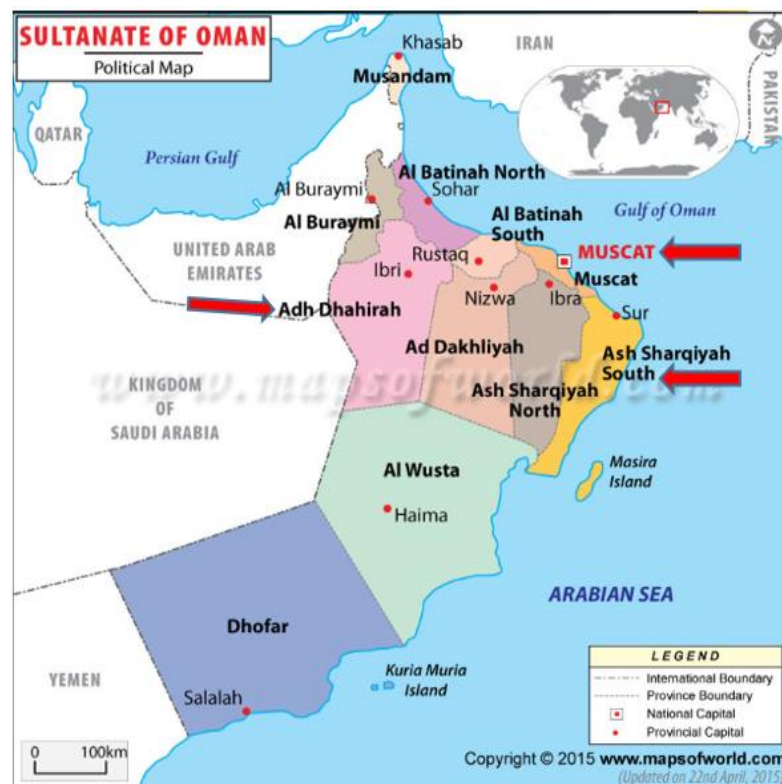


Figure 3.1: Map of the Locations of the Study
(Maps of world, 2012)

3.3.1 One-to-one Interviews with Teachers

I conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with teachers from five schools in the Muscat region with the aim of eliciting teachers' views about the English primary curriculum. I wanted to gain an understanding of teachers' attitudes, motivations, and feelings about the reform in the English primary curriculum (The interview themes can be found in Appendix 1). Interviews are a qualitative form of data collection that give the participants flexibility in expressing their thoughts and feelings in privacy and allow the researcher to establish a trusting relationship with them during the conversation. It is a research method that enables individuals to share their views, experiences and beliefs about the researched topic (Arthur et al., 2012). I planned to use semi-structured interviews as I wished to have an informal conversation with the participants. Although interviews are an appropriate way of gathering information and can be a rich source of data, they are time-consuming and require patience. For example, interviews may not go as planned due to participants' schedules, i.e. some participants may cancel their interview and others may come late to the interview.

The advantage this method has is the flexibility and freedom to control the question sequence (Doody and Noonan, 2013). Gill et al. (2008) affirmed that the flexibility of semi-structured interviews allows for the discovery of information that may not have been thought about by the researcher. For example, in this study, although I knew the areas that I wanted to cover with the interviewee, the flexible, open-ended questions allowed the interviewee the options to explore different issues, as Ryan, Coughlan and Cronin (2009) claimed, that arise spontaneously. These issues will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter.

3.3.2 One-to-One Interviews with Policymakers

I interviewed the Director-General of the General Directorate of Curriculum and the Manager of Cycle 1 Program Department in the hope that these senior people would be interested in discussing information not generally available concerning the issues under investigation (Walford, 2011). I believed that their participation was valuable and could play an active role in answering my second research question *What are the key considerations of Omani policymakers in designing the English as a modern foreign language curriculum?*. The interviews focused on finding out about their responsibilities and views regarding the support teachers received for the implementation of curriculum reform, reasons for changing the curriculum and how teachers were consulted in curriculum development (see Appendix 2).

Williams (1989) pointed to some difficulties about interviewing powerful people. He argued that powerful people can make things difficult for the researcher. For example, they can be unwilling to participate, protective of their privacy and reticent. In this study, both policymakers were made aware of the interview questions in advance and we agreed that they could avoid questions if they were not willing to answer. In addition, both were not reticent or unwilling to divulge sensitive information in any way.

3.3.3 Survey Questionnaire with Children and the Parents

The survey is a quantitative research method that can be used to illustrate the behaviours attitudes and opinions of a particular sample. The importance of surveys in research is acknowledged by Gray (2009) as they enable a systematic collection of data through the use of standardised procedures. This method was used as I needed to collect opinions from a large number of students and their parents in a short period of time. Dornyei (2003) argued that a survey can generate large amounts of information from a wide range of respondents concerning their ideas, values and interests. A

survey questionnaire was an appropriate method for this study as I was interested to collect information from individuals of year 3 and 4 children about issues related to their English class book and skills book.

Robson (2002) argued that one of the disadvantages of questionnaires is that they may be inadequate to understand some forms of information and some respondents may not treat the information seriously. In my case, the questionnaire was written in Arabic to make it easier for both children and their parents to understand. The children's questions were brief. In order to make the questionnaire engaging for pupils, colourful pictures were used, whilst the parents' questions contained three straightforward questions and did not require much time. The pilot study provided me with the opportunity to make some amendments to the wording. For example, in the children's questions, there were some confusing wordings in two questions. As Burton and Bartlett (2004) claimed, the wording should be clear to the respondent group.

The decision to include children as research participants was based on the conviction that they are the ones directly affected by educational decisions and policies (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). As Sather (2006) stressed, having a voice is the students' right as citizens to participate in educational research. I was interested to give children the opportunity to give their views about learning English as a modern foreign language (MFL) and to understand their experiences of developing different skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing.

With the consent of the head teachers, questionnaires with questions for both students in Grades 3 and 4 and parents within each questionnaire (n=250) were distributed by me (see Appendix 3) in five schools. Questionnaires were distributed on the basis of one per child and consisted of two parts including qualitative and quantitative elements. Part 1 was for the students and it started with category response type questions (Campbell, McNamara, and Gilroy, 2003) about gender and year group in order to enable an analysis of patterns of responses from distinct groups. I also used '*Visual Analogue Scales*' (Read and Fine, 2005) that use symbolic representations that

children use to recognize their feelings and opinions in addition to closed response questions (e.g. agree/disagree/not sure) about reading time in English, shared writing, speaking activities, spelling, songs and rhymes, and playing games. In addition to their general experiences of learning English, the students were also asked to supply their names if they were happy to be interviewed in the future. The interviews with children took place in phase 2 of the study.

Part 2 contained three open-ended questions for parents. The questionnaire was distributed to Grade 3 and 4 children and to their parents after they completed part 1 in school. Parents were asked to express their opinions, comments, and feedback and to make suggestions about the English primary curriculum reform of year 3 and 4. The data from parents was needed as I wished to know areas of success and areas that need improvement in the recent reform from the parents' point of view. I also needed to know what were the priority areas and their expectations of their child's learning of English as an MFL. I also needed their responses as evidence of English reform evaluation for the curriculum department as I believed that the data would enhance and develop my understanding of an appropriate curriculum content that will help me working more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English.

Burton and Bartlett (2004) also suggested that in mixed abilities classrooms it is useful to read the questions aloud for students as some students may struggle to read the questions. In this study, most of the participating schools had mixed abilities classrooms, therefore, I read out the questions for pupils. The questionnaire was completed in the classroom during English lessons for the following reasons: 1) to clarify any misunderstandings (Read and Fine, 2005) and to make it clear that they have to fill part one only; 2) to make sure that their responses were not affected by parents at home, and 3) to make it clear to the children that the questionnaire should be returned to their English teacher. According to Burton and Bartlett (2004) to ensure a high return rate of the questionnaire, researchers should think out clear strategies.

3.3.4 Interviews with Children

According to Kvale (2008), interviewing children allows them to express their own views, experiences and understandings. I wanted to know what they liked most in English lessons, their favourite story, song and games, their favourite skill (listening, speaking, reading or writing), what they liked/disliked in English lessons and their opinions about topics in the class book and skills book. I also wanted more clarification about whether they have challenges with their English books and to know their needs (see Appendix 4 for interview schedule). Furthermore, the children were asked questions based around themes that emerged from the questionnaire (e.g. about receptive and productive language skills) from phase 1.

It is important to note that only the students who supplied their names on the questionnaire were interview participants. I planned to interview 10 students from the AL Dahira region and 10 students from Muscat region, but in total, I interviewed 13 students. Three girls in year 3, two girls in year 4 from the Muscat region; two boys in year 3, two boys in year 4, two girls in year 3 and two girls in year 4 from the AL Dahira region.

From the Muscat region, although there were boys that supplied their names on the questionnaire to be interviewed, they did not share that interest on the day when I asked them for the interview. I think the reason was that lack of interest.

Punch (2002) claimed that interview questions for children should be carefully planned. With interviewing children, the researchers must assume clarity of language as they might have limited vocabulary (ibid). As I used to be a primary teacher, I was familiar with the type of language that would be comprehensible to children and with which they would feel at ease. My questions were open-ended questions to allow children to expand on their ideas and experiences and to express a better sense of their thinking (Vasquez, 2000).

3.3.5 Focus Group Discussions

The focus group is a way of discussing a particular topic or issues with several people (Krueger and Casey, 2000; Doody, Slevin and Taggart, 2013) to encourage a variety of viewpoints on the topic (Kvale, 2008). Gillham (2005) argued that the idea of the focus group is tightly focused on content and composition. This strategy is informed by the belief that a focus group discussion helps to gather in-depth beliefs of a large group at one time. In this study, three focus groups were conducted in the Muscat, AL Sharqia South and AL Dahira regions, each involving 4-5 teachers and a senior English teacher delivering the Basic Education and Integrated Curriculum reforms. Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) explained that if a particular issue needs to be understood more fully, it is essential to conduct more than one focus group.

The focus group method is useful to obtain detailed information about personal and group feeling and can provide and explore a broader range of information compared to the more straightforward semi-structured interview method (Kitzinger, 1995). Furthermore, the focus group discussions enabled me to explore themes raised from the one-to-one interviews in phase 1 in more depth to investigate similar and different viewpoints on various issues.

The strengths of this technique lie in the fact that it has a lively interaction (Kvale, 2008) and allows participants to focus on the most important issues by communicating in their own words (Robson, 2002) about what they know and experience (Kitzinger, 1995). By using this technique, I was able to discuss with the teacher's critical comments on different topics and issues about both reforms. A criticism of this technique as affirmed by Robson (2002) and Kitzinger (1995) is confidentiality. In this study, I am conscious of the fact that it is possible some teachers did not express their honest and personal opinions about the topic due to the appearance of their senior English teacher. In order to avoid this problem, I asked questions that I thought that all participants would feel comfortable with (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2013).

It is worth noting that each primary school in Oman has 6 to 8 English teachers and has a designated day for them to meet with a senior English teacher to discuss different issues. Therefore, it was easy for me to schedule a focus group discussion on this day at the teachers' schools. Before beginning the main discussion, which lasted between 40-60 minutes, I asked the participants about their experiences in teaching both reforms and the year group they teach as a warm-up exercise to stimulate thinking and to focus on the topic in question.

3.3.6 One-to-One Interviews with Supervisors and Trainers

Open-ended, semi-structured interviews with supervisors and trainers from the three regions were conducted to find out about the lack of training programmes (see Appendix 5 for interview schedule). I was interested to find out their view about:

- the importance of training for teachers;
- teachers' professional development needs;
- materials available in schools for use by teachers;
- types of support teachers receive to facilitate their classroom teaching;
- teachers' role in curriculum development.

The time and place for the meetings were agreed by the interviewees. All the interviews took place in the participants' offices.

3.4 Participant Sample

Patton and Cochran (2002) argue that the selection of the sample type for a research depends on the purpose of the project. In this study, specifically in phase 1 convenience sampling was undertaken for a specific purpose, for example: (a) data

collection can be conducted in a short duration of time and (b) has easy access. In my case, the schools in phase 1 were selected because they were the easiest to access and within easy travelling distance from my home. I was unable to travel long distances while collecting the data for this phase due to limitations on my time. The participants in this phase provided a convenience sample of teachers, students and their parents in the Basic Education schools from the Muscat region. The participants in Phase 2 provided a purposive sample (a sample of 'experts' or a group that relies on the judgement of the researcher of the specific characteristics that are to be studied) (Patton and Cochran, 2002; Starks and Trinidad, 2007; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2013). In this phase, I included teachers in Basic Education schools from AL Dahira region (three hours driving distance from the Muscat region) and AL Sharqia South Region (two hours driving distance from the Muscat region). These participants were chosen because they followed the 2 different curricula '*Basic Education curriculum*' and '*Integrated Curriculum*'. Supervisors and trainers were also included from the Muscat region, AL Dahira region and AL Sharqia South region because they have information about both reforms.

In this phase, the questionnaire data from students and parents was collected only from the AL Dahira region, as the AL Sharqia South Region School did not wish to participate. In addition, two interviews with policymakers were collected from the Muscat region. The individuals of this phase had knowledge about '*Basic Education curriculum*' and '*Integrated Curriculum*' reforms, although each individual varied in their role, experience, access and expertise.

In addition to the above participants, one-to-one interviews with students were collected from the Muscat region and from the AL Dahira region. In terms of one-to-one interviews with students from the Muscat region, they were convenience sampling of phase 1. The students of phase 2 were a purposive sample as I selected schools which had knowledge about the two English reforms as mentioned earlier. I undertook purposive sampling to focus on specific challenges and advantages about both reforms. Furthermore, to make comparisons (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2013,

cited in: Teddlie and Yu, 2007) as I wanted to find out if the schools' location, the economic backgrounds of students in different regions had any impact on similarities or differences in their views about the curriculum reform.

My selected teacher participants (n=20) taught Cycle one pupils (Grades 1-4) with four to twenty years of experience. Most held Bachelor degrees and two were diploma holding English teachers. Teachers from all three regions shared similar gender, ethnicity, nationality, cultural identity and training programmes. The regional supervisors (n=3) and regional trainers (n=3) of English were all female and had between five and twenty years' experience. Due to the shortage of male trainers in the regions and male supervisors in the primary schools, only female trainers and supervisors participated in this study. Policymakers (n=2) who have more power within the curriculum department and pupils (n=361) enrolled in year 3 and 4 with their parents. Year 3 and 4 students are those who have directly experienced the recent English curriculum reforms; therefore, they provided the sort of data required for this study.

The research was carried out in primary state-funded schools where pupils share socio-cultural backgrounds. I would like to note that at the time when this study was carried out all primary state schools were using the 'the Basic Education Reform' for grades 3 and 4. The data collection period in phase 1 took place after 12 months of implementing the Basic Education Reform' and phase 2 data collection took place after 24 months. As I explained in Chapter 1, the curriculum department did not revert back entirely to the textbook style for Basic Education as there were many positive aspects in the Integrated Curriculum. Therefore, it was necessary for this study that teachers had spent enough time responding to the new reform before it was appropriate to discover their opinions and experiences. It was important to compare teachers' perspectives with policy perspectives to enhance my understanding of the principles of a good curriculum so that I could better design a curriculum for Omani children. An overview of the research design and details of the sample can be viewed in Tables 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 below:

Table 3.1: Pilot Study

Data collection strategy	Number to be sampled
<i>Interviews</i>	<i>4 teachers</i>
<i>Questionnaire</i>	<i>20 children with the parents</i>

Table 3.2: Phase 1 (Muscat Region)

Data collection strategy	Number to be sampled
<i>Interviews</i>	<i>5 teachers</i>
<i>Questionnaire</i>	<i>250 children with the parents</i>

Table 3.3: Phase 2

Data collection Strategy	Muscat	AL Sharqia South	AL Dahira	Total
<i>Focus group Discussion</i>	<i>5 Female Teachers</i>	<i>5 Female Teachers</i>	<i>5 Female Teachers</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Interviews</i>	<i>1 Female Supervisor</i>	<i>1 Female Supervisor</i>	<i>1 Female Supervisor</i>	<i>3</i>
	<i>1 Female Trainer</i>	<i>1 Female Trainer</i>	<i>1 Female Trainer</i>	<i>3</i>
	<i>Director-General of the General Directorate of Curriculum</i>			<i>1</i>
	<i>Manager of (Cycle 1) Program Department</i>			<i>1</i>
	<i>Students enrolled in year 3 and 4</i>			<i>20</i>
<i>Questionnaire</i>			<i>Children with parents</i>	<i>250</i>

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Lindorff (2010) argues that no researcher in any area should conduct research that bears risks and lack of respect for participants. It is important to make sure that ethical

standards in research that involves human participants in schools and other public institutions are given proper and careful consideration (Nunan, 1997). Gray (2009: 73) argued that there are four areas for ethical principles: avoid harm to participants (ensure that participants are not at risk of significant harm), respect the privacy of participants (e.g. names, telephone numbers and addresses should not be accessible to others), avoid the use of deception (being less honest about the study) and ensure informed consent of participants. Informed consent is crucial to ethical research practice because it respects individuals' rights to freedom and self-determination to take decisions for themselves (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2013:77). Typically, the main aim of the informed consent sheet is to explain to the participant that their participation is always voluntary (Patton and Cochran, 2002) and they can withdraw at any time, the aims of the study, the risk, benefits for their participants, how confidentiality would be maintained, what their participation in the research requires and the methods involved. The four ethical principles were considered and addressed in this study as will be discussed in the following.

In the Omani context, it was necessary for the researcher to first approach the Ministry of Education to gain permission for the research who then acted as a conduit, informing relevant personnel in the regions about the research (see Appendix 6). After receiving the permission from the Ministry of Education, I personally contacted the policymakers by email with an initial invitation to participate (see Appendix 7). After receiving positive responses, I then provided them with participant information forms (see Appendix 8) and consent forms (see Appendix 9). Taking into consideration my job as a curriculum officer and working at the same department with the policymakers, it was easy to gain access and it was advantageous too in terms of the policymakers' willingness to participate. Before starting the interview, I explained to them that I would not include materials if they did not wish them to be included (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2013).

In a review of research with policymakers, Walford (2011) argued that it is difficult to protect the identity of powerful people, however, in this study, the policymakers were

offered the option to look at the transcript of the interview and to listen to the recording. This procedure gave them an opportunity to review the recordings to ensure the privacy and confidentiality. Patton and Cochran (2002) and Gillham (2005) pointed out that participants must be informed of the Precautions that will be taken to protect the confidentiality of the data.

According to the supervisors and trainers, I went directly to the regions in April-May 2014 as the permission was already given in regional offices. I talked to some supervisors and trainers and explained my research to them. The participants who expressed interest to participate were provided with the participant information form (see Appendix 8) and the consent form (see Appendix 10) and we discussed when and where the interviews would take place.

In the case of the teachers, I visited the schools and had an initial meeting with the senior English teacher (SET) together with the English teachers. This meeting was important to clarify purpose, the procedures, the potential risks and benefits of their involvement (Patton and Cochran, 2002). I also told them that their participation was always voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. All participants received the participation information sheet (see Appendix 8) and informed consent form (see Appendix 11) and had one week to consider whether they wished to take part in this study. I understand that participants needed time to ask questions for clarification and to have the right to decide whether to take part in the research. The teachers signed a declaration form stating that they understood the research being carried out as well as giving their consent. The interviews were in the schools in a private quiet room that was very comfortable for both of us. All the interviews were audio recorded to avoid any information loss and to react freely with the respondent (Burton and Bartlett, 2004). I also took some notes as a backup.

In the case of the 'focus group discussion,' I had concerns as I noticed that in one region some teachers were very careful in their responses and others were hesitant to express their thoughts and tried to agree with whatever senior English teachers (SET)

said. As I used to be a SET and one of my roles was to conduct meetings in a form of group discussion among 5 to 6 teachers, I was able to obtain the point of view of each teacher by changing the way of asking questions, and by asking for new ideas in order to establish respect and trust and to have better results in terms of information. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013) indicated that focus group moderation requires an experienced and skilful researcher among a group of participants.

3.5.1 Informed Consent of Children

It is argued that young children (people younger than 18 years old) cannot give consent and it is a parental responsibility to make the decision on their behalf (Noret, 2012). However, others believe that valid consent should be obtained from parent or guardian and the child (Twycross, 2009). Seeking the informed consent of children can be different to that of adults as there is a wider range of ethical issues to consider when conducting research involving children. According to Schenk and Williamson (2005), the approach used to gather information among children and adolescents must ensure that children feel respected and can participate safely due to the fact that they have less power and access to resources compared to the adults. (Wiles et al., 2005: cited in Jones and Stanley 2008: 33) argued that 'children under 16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are not automatically presumed to be legally competent and decisions about informed consent are increasingly driven by legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks in which social research takes place'. Jones and Stanley (2008) referred to Wiles et al. (2006) in relation to a complicated issue of gaining access to primary children.

While the research literature suggests the importance of informed consent where participants are considered 'vulnerable', this is not required in the Omani culture, neither from the parents nor the children themselves and researchers can get permission from a school's head teacher only by using the permission to gain access

to school from the Ministry of Education. However, in this study, some steps were involved to get consent from the children as I believe that informed consent is important as explained above. I drew on the protocol for conducting research in line with Liverpool John Moores University and BERA (2011) ethical guidelines regulations. Then I wrote a letter seeking access to schools from the head teachers (see Appendices 12 &13) and I went to the schools to get initial written consent from the head teachers. In terms of researching in schools, Noret (2012) argued that a researcher needs to seek consent from the head teacher before gaining consent from the parents.

In this study, it was agreed that the head teacher would inform the parents that their children would be asked to participate in a questionnaire and interview during a parent-teacher meeting. The head teacher would also explain that there would be an opt-out option if they wished their children not to be included in this study. I understand that the parents' permission does not mean the child has consented to participate, but it allowed me to seek consent from the child (see Appendix 14). After getting the verbal permission from the parents, I visited the school and the questionnaires were distributed to the students by me. It is important to note here that, the classes (grade 3 and 4) that completed the questionnaire happened to be students whose teachers were absent on the day of my visit and the head teacher was happy for me to administer the questionnaire with assistance from the school SET. In each classroom and before students started to complete the questionnaire, I explained some general points such as to fill in only part 1 and that part 2 should be answered by the parents. I also answered some individual questions. There were some students, mostly boys, who did not want to complete the questionnaire and they were not required to do so. This indicates students were able to understand that they had the right to decide whether or not to take part and that I respected and accepted a child's refusal to participate (Twycross, 2009).

It is also important to note here that in the Omani system, primary school children are used to regular tests and grading. Therefore, it was important to tell them that they

were not being tested or judged in order to encourage more honest responses. As Morrow (2005) argued, researching children may be problematic as they may see it as a test and this can make them upset or prevent them from giving an honest answer. Additionally, at the start of the questionnaire, information about the aim of the research and the researcher, was provided, as well as a statement about voluntary participation (see Appendix 3). I understand that to ensure anonymity of respondents, names should not be asked for, but in this study, I asked the students to supply their names and that of their school if they would like to participate in follow-up interviews.

Prior to the interviews, consent forms were administered by the senior English teacher who asked for signatures from both parents and pupils who had a week to decide whether to participate. As Alderson (2005) suggested, students should acknowledge their willingness to participate after having been provided with a clear explanation about the research topic.

3.6 Data Analysis

One-to-one interviews with teachers and students and focus group discussions were carried out in their native language. Initially, I transcribed the interviews in Arabic which were then translated into English. The process of transcription into the language of interview followed by translation was a crucial step, as I was concerned about missing important data. Indeed, this step helped me to become very familiar with the different areas in each interview and to have a comprehensive understanding of the content. The transcriptions from the interviews were reviewed to search for words and phrases to produce codes and themes, think about the relationship between codes, and to name themes. The process of identifying, and analysing patterns within data in this way is understood as following a thematic analysis approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis offers an available and theoretically flexible approach to analyse qualitative data, which they define as: 'A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data' (p. 79). This method focuses on identifying all data

that relate to the already classified patterns, combining related patterns into sub-themes, and defining and naming themes according to arguments emerged from the data. This approach takes particular account of context (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013).

Together with thematic analysis, a content analysis approach (Gray, 2009) was also relevant for this process. Some of the emerging themes within the transcripts were discussed as theoretical concepts in the literature (e.g. there were references to subject knowledge, in-service training and cascade model) and there also seemed to be mention of other themes, which directly related to the research questions. For instance, there was a reference to negative issues experienced due to curriculum reform that contributed to answering research question 3-A. Content analysis is similar to thematic analysis since it 'involves the making of inferences about data (usually text) by systematically and objectively identifying the special characteristics (classes or categories) within them' (Gray, 2009: 500). However, it also involves counting the frequency of themes within a text to determine their significance (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). I used prior themes from both the literature and related to the research questions, as explained above, as the categories required for conducting a content analysis of the data and to influence the final categorisation of themes, which are presented in Chapter 4.

As explained earlier, this study was designed in three distinct phases: a pilot study, phase 1 and phase 2. The data from the pilot study fell into two broad themes: (a) the challenges of teaching English as an MFL in primary schooling and (b) issues with teacher-training programmes.

In phase 1, semi-structured oral interviews (see Appendix 1) were conducted with five teachers. In this phase, I was searching for themes and I created additional codes that helped to answer the research question (3-A). In this process, it became noticeable that there were not only consistencies between the pilot phase and phase 1 interviews

with teachers, but also between teachers' views and parents' views expressed in the survey about challenges in the curriculum reform.

In phase 2, in addition to the main interview questions used in phase 1, probes and follow up questions were used to elicit additional information about the themes that emerged from phase 1. In-depth probing during the interviews and focus group discussions revealed several issues on challenges faced by teachers in relation to the recently developed curriculum, supervision and training programmes. Thinking about the relationship between codes of phase 1 and 2, the themes of phase 1 were reviewed and defined according to new names (see phase 2 themes in table 3.4).

In phase 2, I set about collecting further data from teachers by employing focus group discussions in three regions of Oman to investigate whether teachers in other regions seemed to be affected by similar issues to those in Muscat (the capital). I also wanted to investigate in greater depth about teachers' contribution to the decision-making process for curriculum development, their views about the teachers' book and the process of communication and consultation with teachers during curriculum reform. I focused on these issues because they constitute a part of the anxiety expressed by participants of phase 1.

Table 3.4: Emerging themes from the data collection

Methods	Themes from pilot study	Themes from phase 1	Themes from phase 2 that also linked to research questions: (3A,3B) and 4
Interviews and focus group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges of teaching English as an MFL in primary schooling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of knowledge about primary pedagogy for teaching MFL Lack of resources The curriculum should reflect the Omani culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges teachers experienced in the recent curriculum reform

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges of teacher-training programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shortage of training for English teachers ▪ In-service training failed to reflect the curriculum and classroom context ▪ Teachers should participate in curriculum development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Nature of in-service training courses (e.g. how the training is organised and conducted) ▪ Importance of working in partnership and participating in the curriculum development process ▪ Supervisors' role in curriculum implementation
Questionnaire		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges with productive skills ▪ Challenges with student-centred- learning activities ▪ Students' and parents' positive attitudes towards English as an MFL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Different levels of confidence in the receptive and productive language skills ▪ Students' views of topics ▪ High levels of intrinsic motivation ▪ Parents' positive attitudes towards English as an MFL
Interviews with policymakers, trainers and supervisors			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges in curriculum reform e.g. reading and writing skills ▪ In-service training programmes and problems with a cascade model ▪ The importance of working in partnership e.g. contribution to the decision-making process for curriculum change

Initially, the interview data collected from teachers was coded manually by using highlighters and coloured pens, but later utilised NVivo8 software (Gibson and Brown, 2009). Because I had large data sets, NVivo8 was very helpful in organising and

managing a clear coding structure which also helped later in searching for data and creating relationships between themes.

There were also significant issues raised from the questionnaire with pupils in Phase 1, such as (a) challenges with productive skills, and (b) student-centred learning activities (e.g. group work activities). In the light of these findings, I conducted phase 2 to investigate whether pupils in other part of the country had similar views to those in Muscat. These themes were further explored in the distributed questionnaire to a school in another region to extend and support the generation of evidence for this study as well 1-1 interviews (n=13) with individual students.

To analyse the quantitative data, e.g. (the survey questionnaire) I used the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). In the case of children's responses, I was able to explore what was considered as enjoyable and less enjoyable in grade three and four English materials. The analysis also involved the investigation of possible correlations between year group and gender of the students.

The findings from the questionnaire were then compared with the one-to-one interviews with children. The use of SPSS also enabled me to gain descriptive statistics about demographics within the sample. Interestingly the response in both regions were similar. This indicates that the teaching system provided similar support to develop students' learning. The open-ended questions posed to parents within the questionnaire were analysed in relation to the research question and were compared with emerging themes from other data, for example, about challenges in the grade 3 and 4 curriculum in particular.

In investigating policymakers', trainers' and supervisors' views about the English curriculum reform, there were several codes that related to challenges in curriculum reform and in-service training programmes. I felt that this data supported other data sources (e.g. teachers' interviews). Finally, in order to compare all the data sets with

one another in this study, I used Gvirtz and Beech's (2004) and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead's (2012) frameworks (see Chapter 5).

3.7 Quality Issues: Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness is about making judgements about the 'believability' of the study in relation to the findings, criteria, arguments and questions undertaken (Robson, 2002). Judging the quality of the research process and related tools in qualitative research is different from quantitative research (Shenton, 2004) due to the different nature and purpose of both approaches. The trustworthiness in qualitative research is often criticised and questioned for lacking scientific rigour, lacking generalizability and being based upon personal impression (Gray, 2009). The quality criteria of 'validity' and 'reliability' which are used in quantitative research are considered unsuitable for this study. Instead, the concepts of 'trustworthiness' and 'credibility' were employed, as this study is predominantly of a qualitative nature and firmly located within the interpretive paradigm (Guba 1981, in Shenton 2004:64). Guba and Lincoln (1994) argued that trustworthiness in qualitative research could be addressed through a focus on criteria such as credibility, triangulation and transferability.

The data is credible, in terms of providing honest responses from the participants, because of the trust I was able to establish as a researcher. Due to my professional background, I had already established good professional relationships with many of the participants from previous experience working as an English teacher for 18 years in different schools in the Muscat region, in addition to having visited some of the schools as a curriculum officer. The participants in this study talked openly about their views and experiences. Spending sufficient time in the research context helped me further to build trust with the participants, producing more credible results (Krefting, 1999). I also was more likely to interpret the data in a credible way because of my

insider knowledge which assisted me in understanding the context. According to Sabourin (2007), credibility in qualitative research is about establishing confidence in the truth and accuracy in the interpretation of the data.

It is important here to note that, because of my previous role, a feeling of familiarity with some participants and classroom experiences, I was aware of my personal and professional biases, and this led me to be more careful in separating my own knowledge from theirs. According to Malterud (2001) 'A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions' (p. 483-484). To improve reflexivity and to enhance the overall quality of the research process, I ask more questions about particular aspects that mattered to my research and made a conscious effort not to voice my opinions.

Thick description (Shenton, 2004; Shaw, 2013) of this study is another strategy that I hope to ensure the credibility in this research. For instance, with a highly detailed description of this study, e.g. specific information and a detailed description of phenomena under investigation, location and methods, a reader can make connections between elements of this study and their own experience in other regions around Oman considering the diversity of characteristics that the sample represents.

A further means of securing trustworthiness was achieved through triangulation of different data sources using different instruments (Bekhet and Zauszniewski, 2012). It is a way of assuring the validity and to understand the phenomena better (Redfern and Norman, 1994) and it strengthens the outcomes of the research because of the use of more than one method (Sharif and Armitage, 2004). In order to enhance the validity of this study, it was designed as mixed methods where the data from teachers, supervisors and trainers were gathered and triangulated.

Transferability is also another kind of validity in qualitative research that refers to the findings of one study being applied generalised or transferred to other contexts or settings. According to Krefting (1999) and Shenton (2004), to determine transferability, it is important for the researchers to supply a highly detailed description of the research situation, information about particular sample, and methods. In this study, I used the adequate thick description of the participants under study, the research context and setting to allow the readers to have a proper understanding of it.

The purpose of this chapter was to outline my ontological and epistemological position, describe the research design, methods, sampling, ethical considerations, data analysis and the trustworthiness of the study. In the following chapter, I shall present the findings of this study supported by quotes from interview transcripts and questionnaire results. In addition, I will analyse the findings in light of existing knowledge discussed in the literature review.

CHAPTER 4: Results and Analysis

This chapter provides a detailed description and analysis of the findings from the two empirical data collection phases. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into sections according to the second, third and fourth major research questions. The first question is addressed in an integrated manner within each of the three sections.

4.1 The purpose of English and the Primary Curriculum

This section answers the second major research question:

What are the key considerations of Omani policymakers in designing English as a modern foreign language curriculum?

The policymakers' perspective

Two interviews were conducted with policymakers, the Director-General of the General Directorate of Curriculum (GO-1) and the Manager of Cycle 1 Program Department (GO-2). I explained in the methodology chapter why I chose to interview these policymakers (see section 3.3.2). The following themes were addressed in the interviews: their views regarding the purpose of English as an MFL in the primary curriculum, reasons for changing the curriculum, the support teachers received for the implementation of curriculum reform, and how teachers were consulted in curriculum development. Another question I wanted to explore here was the policymakers' roles and responsibilities in order to understand their remit regarding curriculum reform. GO-1 was responsible for managing the whole curriculum department for grades 1-12 for all subjects in government schools, while GO-2's office was responsible for writing and

developing the Cycle 1 (grades1-4) curriculum in collaboration with the assessment and supervision departments.

4.1.1 The Purpose of English as an MFL at Primary School

Regarding the purpose of designing English as an MFL at primary school, GO-1 expressed that *'The purpose of designing English as an MFL is the result of changes in the society or changes in life, technology and communication, peoples' thinking as well'*; while the GO-2 mentioned: *'To equip young Omani students to communicate in an international world'*. This seemed to mirror the Ministry of Education (1995) guidelines, which suggested that students should be prepared for the requirements of the labour market as outlined in the introduction chapter (see 1.2). MFL at the primary schooling level has been found to be provide students with experiences, skills and knowledge of the real world that will continue later in life (Sharp, 2001).

4.1.2 Reasons for Changing the Curriculum

As explained above, one of the policymakers' responsibilities was to write and develop the curriculum. Their remit was passed to them by an authority above them. However, as GO-1 indicated, he implied that there was no perfect curriculum as it is the translation of a broader policy of the state; this process was not an easy task as *'...it is a very big decision, which is made at a higher level in any educational system'*. March (2004) also pointed to the role of the macro level in curriculum development that seeks to rework e.g. what knowledge is valued in the curriculum and how to teach it.

Both policymakers explained that in addition to responding to some broader state policies, additional reasons for changing the curriculum were the result of: 1) feedback from the field, e.g. students, teachers, parents, and 2) feedback from officials, e.g.

supervisors and curriculum officers. GO-2 viewed this stage of feedback as vital: *'they would give feedback on what is working, what isn't, what needs to be changed and developed and why, and suggestions for development'*. Her concern was to continually listen to the feedback. She believed that the curriculum department should continue collecting feedback from teachers and every four or five years the curriculum should change in response to this. According to her, the first year of using a new curriculum is a trial stage and after four or five years *'..... you can tell if the reform has been working or not, or [if] it has been effective or not'*.

She also explained why the primary curriculum was changed: *'In the year of 2004, the Cycle-1 curriculum was evaluated by a Canadian company [Canad.com] and there were some recommendations; also [the World Bank] has been involved later in the evaluation. So a call for change has come from more than one source'*. GO-2 response explained that there were a number of government initiatives taken to change the primary curriculum with all subjects in addition to English in order to prepare students for economic challenges.

The role of the economic concerns in the curriculum was seen through the structure of the primary curriculum the *'Integrated Curriculum'* (IC) as GO-2 said: *'So change for Cycle-1 has been put through a new proposal, a new system called Integrated Curriculum'*. As argued in section (1.2.1) the aim of English subject in IC curriculum was to introduce the learning of Mathematics and Science through English. From the perspective of foreign language learning, an integrated curriculum is commonly referred to as *'Content and Language Integrated Learning'* (CLIL) (Storm, 2009).

GO-1 clarified that changing the curriculum was a response to the technological revolution and the need to catch up with the world's education systems: *'curriculum development aimed to provide students with the ability to apply technological innovations'*.

The other reason for changing the curriculum seemed to be the lack of focus on reading

and writing skills in the old curriculum. Both policymakers referred to reading and writing skills as being important skills that were developed in the recent curriculum. According to them, a majority of teachers reported in the feedback that the curriculum needed more activities related to these two skills. GO-1 argued *'In Grades 1-2 English curriculum we used to focus on two main skills listening and speaking only, but teachers are suggesting that the writing and reading are important too'*. Therefore, as he argued, based on that need, the curriculum provided teachers with sufficient tasks and activities (e.g. shared reading, reading time and shared writing) to teach both skills. GO-2 argued that, with the recent reform, when students leave primary school they should be able to read and write sentences in English.

4.1.3 Teacher Development

With regard to how to prepare teachers for curriculum implementation, the interviewees' views fell into three categories: training and development through a cascade model, provision of resources and communication with teachers.

a. Training and Development Through a Cascade Model

According to GO-1 and GO-2, there are training opportunities in all regions around the Sultanate. However, GO-2 argued that the training department used to offer training for all English teachers to attend regional teacher-training programmes, but now: *'What happened is that the training department said, first of all, they don't have the capacity to train all teachers and there is no time'*. Therefore, according to her, they only train supervisors and senior English teachers (SETs) and she expressed concern and unhappiness about the cascade model.

As discussed in section 2.2.9, the cascade model is implemented due to ease of implementation and organisation (Kennedy, 2014). Although this model was implemented to train many teachers within a short period of time, GO-2 argued that it was unsatisfactory: *'SETs implement the training but the training depends on how good the SET is, how well she can present it to her teachers, and also when she will do it. I know some SETs will take it easy and will not view it as an urgent task. That really affected the implementation and I know teachers are not happy with the amount of support'*.

Furthermore, she said that when the grade 3 curriculum reform was introduced there were new approaches such as shared writing, grammar introduction, and reading time, and only SETs attended in-service training and learned about these approaches. However, GO-2 criticised the cascade model because teachers received insufficient support. She believed that the cascade model was used inappropriately. It seems that there were two groups of SETs, a group of SETs passed on the training as soon as possible and the other group did not conduct it immediately or effectively. The difficulty is that it seems to have been assumed by the training department that the use of the cascade model will reach out to many teachers quickly, but it seems that they did not recognise that there might be issues with the use of this model.

b. Provision of Resources

Regarding materials for use by teachers, both policymakers talked about different materials, for example, flashcards, word cards, stories, audio recordings, class and skills books for children, and teachers' books.

GO-2 clarified that the teachers' book (TB) is another resource that supports teachers in planning and implementation. According to her, it is like a 'training course' that provides teachers with guidance about how to plan and teach. She then argued that,

although it offers step-by-step guidance (with a large amount of prescription), it allows teachers to use their own pedagogical strategies.

In the interview, I told her that *'teachers are complaining that the supervisors want them to follow TB step by step?'* (Interviewer).

'Yes, that's right. It happens, but you see the philosophy of the curriculum is that the TB is a resource so we highly advise new teachers to follow it because as you know new teachers are still finding their way and TB is a good model. However, if new teachers are confident enough, they can modify activities according to their students' needs' (GO-2).

She then elaborated further about how she blamed supervisors for not encouraging experienced teachers to use different pedagogical approaches: *'It is a shame that supervisors are not allowing them to modify [their approaches]. I personally believe that experienced teachers should start thinking, making decisions, should have a voice to develop the materials and to apply different approaches and strategies that suit the needs of their children'*.

From my experience as a teacher, it is not surprising that supervisors would not allow teachers to adapt the curriculum. However, drawing on GO-2's response, teachers should be trusted to make decisions that are based upon the individual needs of learners in their classrooms.

GO-2 also wanted teachers to use technology in the classroom. She argued that *'You know children nowadays like to see videos and movies. The curriculum should start updating itself with all of that to become part of the teaching resources together with the books and other resources'*. Her response indicated that, although students benefited from using 'props' (see section 2.1.3), there is still a need to use technology in the classroom and it is the curriculum authorities' responsibility to provide schools with this resource. This is in line with Bruniges (2005), who claimed that policymakers

should supply schools with technology. This suggests the importance of using technology in the classroom as it can enhance learning (Chen, Quadir and Teng, 2011).

c. Communication with Teachers

Regarding communication with teachers, policymakers seemed concerned with two main issues: lines of communication from the government department to teachers and consultation with teachers during curriculum reform.

▪ Informing Teachers about Recent Curriculum Reform

GO-1 gave an overview of the way they inform teachers and said '*Curriculum officers usually go to visit schools and listen to whatever teachers suggested. Before approval of the curriculum, there are some different levels of discussions and revisions and teachers are usually informed*'. According to him, when introducing a new curriculum reform, there were different ways to inform teachers: 1) through a leaflet delivered to schools as he argued:

'Each school receives a copy of that guide and teachers should know and the school as a whole if there are new textbooks' and 2) via an English newsletter:

'... teachers are required to go through those newsletters and to know what is new in the English curriculum'.

GO-1's remarks lead us to believe that there is a lack of attention from curriculum authorities to communicate with teachers on changes in the curriculum. It must be argued that communication is more than just leaflets or newsletters that are sent to schools. Communication also involves interaction with the teachers and this can be achieved through curriculum officers or supervisors.

Whilst GO-1 made reference to these two ways of informing teachers, GO-2 seemed overly concerned and thought there was no clear procedure for informing teachers about recent curriculum reform. She explained that when she and her team were working on the integrated curriculum (IC) (*abolished in 2011/2012*) they visited all the pilot schools and had a discussion with all school staff, with supervisors and government officers: *'...there was an introduction from us about the new system, about the new curriculum, about how the teaching strategies should be implemented. We also gave them an introduction about the type of training they will receive'*.

She then further explained her experience when she was a teacher and before the Basic Education curriculum (see section 1.2.1) was launched in schools: *'Before the introduction of Basic Education, we were told that there will be a new system and it is called Basic Education. We were trained and we were given all the resources to enable us to teach the new system easily. The English department put more effort into training teachers. There were, for example, 100 hours to train teachers, while other teachers of other subjects did not have the same opportunity'*. This comparison of the previous reforms with the recent reform shows that not enough hours were dedicated to training.

GO-2 also referred to supervisors (see section 1.5) as a way of communicating with and supporting teachers. According to her, supervisors often visit schools, observe, and discuss different issues with teachers. Therefore, she believed that one-to-one communication is valuable if it is done well.

▪ **Involvement of Teachers in English Curriculum Development**

Regarding the involvement of teachers in English curriculum development, GO-1 started by saying *'There is an opportunity, of course'*. According to him, teachers contribute to the decision-making process for curriculum development through focus group discussions, or by responding to questionnaires sent to schools, and by providing feedback through their supervisors. He also argued, however, that there

needs to be a discussion about the teachers' feedback. For example, *'Who are these teachers? Does it [the feedback] come from well-trained experienced teachers?'* Based on teachers' background and experience, the feedback will be taken into consideration. He believed that taking teachers' feedback into consideration means that teachers are partners in the curriculum development. However, at the end of the interview, he provided a perspective which acknowledges that teachers need training to be involved in curriculum development:

'Teachers do need training that focuses on methodology and a language learning strategy that is consistent with the new curriculum reform goals because they were trained differently in the university. They do need the necessary skills and knowledge'. As shown in his earlier response, he believed that it was necessary to consider teachers' experience when taking their feedback into account.

On the other hand, GO-2 felt that:

'Teachers' involvement is not that big in the Ministry and teacher involvement occurs at different levels. ...we would form a committee and on that committee would be a teacher or two, a SET or two, a supervisor or two. That kind of involvement, however, that one person or two, they don't reflect the whole country, that's why we keep hearing from other far-away regions like Musandam and ALWista, that they are not involved in the curriculum development because physically they are not involved'.

Furthermore, she suggested that in the curriculum department there should be a criterion for *'teacher inclusion in curriculum development'*. She believed that it was important to involve teachers in curriculum development at a higher level and that this would satisfy them.

She again argued that:

'I think teacher involvement shouldn't just [be] calling a teacher from one region, putting them in a committee and then assuming as a ministry that we have involved teachers.... I think we should go with the type of curriculum that would allow teachers

to have a voice, a type of curriculum that would get them involved and they would feel involved’.

‘Teachers should be integrated into the processes of the curriculum development across all different regions. They are partners and must participate in decision-making and planning. Working with teachers will build a strong relationship between them and the other sectors and departments in the Ministry of Education. Working between different parties will encourage compliance rather than simply receipt and implementation’.

She then explained why teachers should have a role in curriculum development: *‘Without teachers’ involvement, they would definitely question it, they won’t feel prepared to implement it, and they would say that there are challenges to understanding it. They would be defensive and will be blaming others’.* The evidence by Datnow and Castellano (2005) suggested that without teachers’ involvement in curriculum planning, teachers would complain about the reform.

Although the policymakers had different perspectives regarding the ways in which to involve teachers in the curriculum reform process, it seems that both believed that teachers are partners in the designing of the curriculum. A similar view has been found in the literature. For instance, Banegas (2011: 430) argued that teachers should play a role in curriculum development so that they ‘do not feel the imposition of a reform is alien to them’.

4.1.4 Meeting Primary Learners’ and Teachers’ Needs

The comments from both policymakers made it clear that the recent English curriculum reform should be cognisant of primary learners’ and teachers’ needs because the development was based on feedback from these two different parties, as discussed

earlier. GO-1 argued that the grade 1 curriculum used to focus on only two skills, listening and speaking, but teachers suggested that reading and writing are important too. Driscoll and Frost (1999) and Jones and Coffey (2013) supported the idea that the four skills reading, writing, listening and speaking should receive equitable attention at the primary level.

Therefore, the curriculum department provided some schools (as a pilot study) with *Jolly Phonics*' books, material and training to teach literacy through phonics. According to GO-1, the pilot study was conducted to understand how teachers felt about the new approach. After receiving their positive feedback, the curriculum department provided other schools with *Jolly Phonics*' materials. He also argued that the class library was introduced for grade 1 and the schools were supplied with stories.

He then referred to grades 3 and 4 curriculum and how the recent reform offers greater opportunities in phonics, spelling, and shared and guided writing for learners. He argued that the new reform placed a great deal of emphasis on reading and writing skills to meet both teachers' and learners' needs. He explained that: '*We wanted teachers to be more positive about the changes, to feel supported and to feel that we are focusing on their needs*'. Similarly, GO-2 mentioned that the introduction of *Jolly Phonics* in the grade 1 curriculum and the introduction of reading and writing skills in grades 3 and 4 met the needs.

As has been noted from the above findings, both reading and writing skills were a central concern in the primary curriculum. It seems that teachers' needs were specifically focused on developing these two skills. The findings suggested, however, that the listening and speaking skills were seen as less of a concern. There may some reasons for this: the curriculum included enough activities to teach these skills, or teachers were more confident to teach both skills.

4.1.5 Policymakers' Views about Curriculum Officers

In the interviews, I also asked the policymakers about the curriculum officers. Both policymakers referred to the curriculum officers as '*a key factor in the curriculum department processes*'. Both argued that the officers are responsible for assessing, writing, developing the materials and producing the curricula. Furthermore, curriculum officers should ensure that the curriculum is meeting intended objectives, time and duration, and they can make recommendations about how to improve curricula. Moreover, they should have the ability to listen to and mentor teachers. However, according to the policymakers, one of the problems for these curriculum officers was the absence of training. Neither policymaker could give a clear answer (when asked specifically if curriculum officers fulfil all their roles). GO-1 responded, '*I must admit that there is no career development path*'. However, he then elaborated further about how the curriculum department is planning to train them now:

'We are trying to deal with this issue now and we are trying to develop a professional development plan for all curriculum officers. We are looking for an international institute, which can provide [Diploma in Curriculum Design and Development]'.

GO-2 also argued that curriculum officers should attend a course that provides them with ongoing development to enhance their skills and knowledge in developing and reviewing the curriculum. She also highlighted the level of experience that policymakers preferred. According to her, the ideal candidate should have 15 years of professional experience as a teacher or a senior English teacher: '*I think curriculum officers work better and become more productive if they are experienced and if they [have] stood in the classroom*'.

The comments from both policymakers suggest that curriculum officers are often placed in their roles with little attention to the skills and subject knowledge that they have for developing the materials. The curriculum officers' role is, some would argue, the most important issue that would affect curriculum change. There is no doubt, for instance, that lack of training has implications for the way the curriculum officers deal

with the curriculum.

Conclusion

The data suggest that there have been significant differences between the two policymakers' responses about informing, and consulting teachers about the recent curriculum reform. GO-1 argued about informing teachers in terms of the leaflet and English newsletter. GO-2 seemed to be calling for communication with teachers where the issues of curriculum change can be delivered clearly. She drew attention to a number of factors that are important when communicating with teachers: the teachers need to be informed about any changes in the curriculum; therefore, supply more information about the new reform and supply schools with the needed resources (e.g. technology).

With regard to the involvement of teachers in curriculum development, according to GO-1 responses, the curriculum policy is being implemented with a bottom-up approach that involved stakeholders such as teachers and parents; however, there is evidence that this process was not clearly a bottom-up approach. For example, GO-2 argued: *'Teachers' involvement is not that big in the Ministry'*. This suggested the lack of teachers' involvement in the curriculum development process and there is no doubt that curriculum policy needs to do more to demonstrate how bottom-up approach can improve the quality of teacher' involvement.

Although there were similarities between policymakers' responses in terms of opportunities in teacher training programmes, GO-2 talked about the disadvantages of the cascade model in having a negative effect on the teachers, and how some teachers were not able to implement the new approaches in the curriculum reform.

The following section provides an in-depth look at opportunities and challenges of curriculum implementation and whether teachers' views differs from those presented by the policymakers.

4.2 Opportunities and Challenges of Curriculum Implementation

This section attempts to answer the third major research question (3.A):

What opportunities and challenges did the teachers experience in the recent curriculum reforms?

As I have already noted in Chapter 1, in 2010 and 2011 the curriculum for grades 3 and 4 was rewritten and had been subject to a number of changes. The analysis of the interviews with policymakers in section 4.1 indicated that there were opportunities, in the form of direct dissemination of information informing teachers about these changes, e.g. sending newsletters about the English curriculum updates to schools and by asking supervisors to communicate directly with the teachers. The interviews with policymakers also indicated that teachers were offered opportunities to express their needs, to be consulted in recent curriculum reforms and to attend training programmes. This section presents the perspectives of English teachers and a senior English teacher in all three regions about perceived opportunities and challenges associated with curriculum reform.

In order to protect the confidentiality of research participants, a pseudonym is used for both phase 1 and 2 teachers. As discussed in the methodology chapter, phase 1 participants were from the Muscat region only and participants of phase 2 were from three regions. Participants (e.g. teachers) are followed by codes denoting their regions and their roles (d= AL Dahirah region; s= AL Sharqia South region; m= Muscat region; SET= Senior English teacher).

4.2.1 Missed Opportunities in Recent Curriculum Reforms

Introducing the curriculum reform for grades 3 and 4 involved some opportunities for teachers in the three regions. From a positive perspective, teachers felt that they had the opportunity to hear from supervisors and colleagues about specific changes in the English curriculum. There were also opportunities to attend training through a cascade model and to participate in curriculum development through consultation by sending their views and comments to the curriculum department. However, in many respects, the curriculum reforms seem to have brought missed opportunities rather than new openings.

- **Issues with Training Courses**

Only a few teachers in this study said that they had the opportunity to attend training for this reform; others said that they did not have an opportunity to attend training, but instead it was cascaded to them by their SET. As Retaj [d] claimed: *‘For curriculum reform, the Ministry is focusing on training SETs and then the SETs have to conduct a mini-workshop for the teachers’*.

Some teachers complained about not having attended training for a long time and commented about their own lack of confidence with pronunciation which they felt needed support. For example, Bdoor [d] argued that:

‘Pronunciation of already difficult sounds is made harder by the fact that it’s often hard to guess how a word is pronounced’. Another teacher said: *‘Teachers do not use words or sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the English language’* Retaj [d]. As a result, if teachers pronounce words incorrectly the learners will do the same (Fatma-d). Jones and McLachlan (2009) argued that students should listen to a good model of speech which would enable them to distinguish between individual words from a series of sounds.

Manal [s] also felt that she was facing challenges while teaching the writing skill and grammar rules with low student participation in these lessons. She felt that she needed to attend training to support her with this. Manal suspected that her lack of pedagogical knowledge had an impact on her students who appeared anxious and frustrated. The above responses indicate that teachers knew that there were gaps in their subject knowledge and this may influence their performance in teaching English as an MFL.

As far as attending training was concerned, teachers from the region [s] thought that it would be a good idea to visit schools, meet other teachers, and learn from their experiences about implementing curriculum changes. US Department of Education (1999), Boyle, While and Boyle (2004) and Kwakman (2003) stressed the importance of co-operation with colleagues in terms of engaging teachers in exchanging feedback and new information.

▪ **Consultation**

The most commonly quoted procedure in which teachers said they had the opportunity to participate in curriculum development was that of sending their comments and suggestions to the curriculum department through their supervisors. Whilst some teachers were satisfied with this opportunity other teachers felt that they needed to be more directly involved in the development process as they knew the students' levels and they had direct teaching experience. Such a view was expressed by Abrar [SET-m] who mentioned that:

'I like to work on curriculum development alongside teaching because when you teach, you learn how content is taught. You know classroom settings, issues, concerns, and problems. Sometimes the curriculum officers make a considerable effort, but when they come to the field, they realise that the curriculum does not meet the learners' needs. I think the teachers who work in the field should help during the process of developing the curriculum'.

In order for opportunities to be better realised, there were a number of key issues which needed to be considered. First, teachers needed to attend training at the first point of access rather than having it cascaded to them. As Warda [m], an experienced teacher, thought:

'having a new curriculum meant to me learning new techniques, knowing about new theories and that new training support is available'. It is possible that teachers were dissatisfied with the cascade models due to the fact that the SETs were not able to cascade the training clearly and therefore it was not perceived to be useful for the teachers. Second, many teachers thought that they needed to be involved directly in the curriculum process, to ensure that the curriculum took adequate consideration of both their needs and their students' needs. *'We wrote our comments more than one time, but there is no change. Those who are developing the curriculum don't know what is happening in the schools, we are living with the learners, and we are facing challenges with the teaching of content'* Manal [s].

The analysis of the above responses indicates that teachers have the opportunity to attend training and to participate indirectly in curriculum development; however, teachers raised concerns about these kinds of opportunities as they had certain inadequacies. There were two issues related to missed opportunities (1) Teachers were not offered in-depth courses where they can develop their English subject knowledge (e.g. pronunciation and content of English language), (2) in relation to consultation the teacher's role was through sending written comments to the curriculum department. Furthermore, they faced several other significant challenges with curriculum reform.

4.2.2 Challenges Faced by Teachers in Relation to the More Recently Developed Curriculum

Before discussing the challenges, it seems important to point out here that recent grade 3 and 4 curriculum planning was related to the advantages of the IC curriculum (see

Chapter 1, section 1.7). On the whole, teachers were much more positive about the change and about the new approaches such as the introduction of shared reading, shared writing, reading time and grammar rules. In spite of the expectation that this reform will be responding to the teachers' and students' needs, in grade 3 and 4 curriculum teachers have seen little evidence of this happening. In other words, there were nearly twice as many challenges compared to the advantages. The teachers discussed numerous challenges in implementing curriculum reform. Analysis of the data revealed that the challenges faced by teachers fell into seven broad categories: (1) curriculum content, (2) inadequacies of textbook and teacher's book, (3) lack of resources, (4) lack of guidance with differentiation, (5) problems with assessment, (6) parents cannot help with English, and finally, (7) the relationship between teachers and their supervisors.

4.2.2.1 Curriculum Content

The first issue that emerged within the construct of implementing the new curriculum was curriculum content. Teachers of the three regions shared the same feeling that they were struggling to cope with both an overloaded curriculum and inappropriate content.

- **Overloaded Curriculum**

Teachers in the region [d] started by arguing that this recent reform has too many objectives and activities and they did not find enough time to teach it. Fatma's [d] declaration supports this case:

'We have to teach more than one skill and a song in one lesson. There are lots of aims in one lesson, and we cannot achieve them all'.

The situation with curriculum overload as some teachers reported made them skip some content, specifically the games, because they needed more time. As Manal [s] commented *'There are games in the book, but sometimes we do not teach them, because there is no time to teach them, and we want to finish the curriculum'*. However, according to Sharpe (2001), teaching games is beneficial to children's learning and through playing they can improve confidence and fluency. It seems that there is a shift in focus from teaching and learning to curriculum coverage.

Teachers also faced difficulties with teaching 'shared writing'. There are two stages of shared writing involving 'modelled writing' (whereby the teacher is in front of the class doing all the writing and getting students' ideas, lots of discussion about vocabulary and spelling and 'independent writing' when they use ideas from the shared writing as a scaffold to produce their own independent piece. The teachers were struggling with this approach because they only have one lesson of 40 minutes to teach the two stages. They felt that each stage should be used as a stand-alone lesson. Many asserted the importance of having two lessons. As one teacher remarked:

'Students need time to be provided with guidance and a model to help them build up the language. Most students struggle and have a lot of spelling mistakes. There is no time to go back and do more guided writing, no opportunity for students to receive feedback' Bushra[s]. The evidence by Graves (1994) suggested that shared reading can be beneficial if it is implemented once a week, in focused lessons.

Another problem was related to celebrations that had to take place during the school year. Teachers highlighted that these events had a negative impact because there was no consideration of these events in the curriculum plan. Abrar [m] expressed the view that *'the policymakers are responsible because when they changed the curriculum, they showed no consideration to holiday periods such as national holidays and Eid holidays'*.

- **Inappropriate Content**

In addition to the overloaded curriculum, teachers also thought that the content was often inappropriate and caused much of the anxiety. Grade 4 teachers believed that the curriculum should take into account learners' abilities to achieve higher levels of understanding. Bdoor [d] discussed one key idea which policymakers should understand in relation to appropriate content for primary learners: *'Before writing materials, policymakers should remember that they are dealing with young learners, they are primary students, and the topics should not be above their levels or below it'*.

Grade 3 teachers also talked about this issue, for example, Ameera [m] said:

'I thought the content would be much better, and easier. I was disappointed with the grade 3 curriculum'.

Teachers also stressed the need for policymakers to ensure that the content meets the children's needs (boys and girls). Some teachers noted that the content in the curriculum should promote both gender interests. More specifically, some teachers thought that some topics were feminist and did not motivate boys to participate, for example, Badria said:

'There is a topic in grade four about hoovering, washing and sweeping. In my class, the boys were not interested in participating when we did this topic'. It seemed that this type of content does not resonate motivationally.

Other teachers believed that boys tended to have difficulties sitting still for long periods. They claimed that the curriculum should contain more content that deals with physical activities because, as they observed, boys learn more by playing. Within the literature, researchers have found that boys respond better to clear justification and fun (Jones and Coffey, 2006). Teachers stressed the importance of designing content in the curriculum that caters for students' different gender and abilities. It would suggest that providing MFL students with more fun activities could help them learn as well as motivating boys to concentrate in their lessons. The work of Crookes and Schmidt

(1991) has suggested that course-specific motivational components should consist of four categories, interest, relevance, expectancy and satisfaction.

Teachers also identified negative effects of scientific topics, as one teacher noted that: *'There is a lesson about a life cycle of the butterfly. According to her, those students do not have any prior knowledge about it and straight away they have to learn the different stages'* (Laila-m). Manal [s] argued that *'The scientific topic is difficult, and the teacher cannot transfer the information to the children'*. It seemed that teachers' problems were related to the lack of appropriate teaching methods and low level of PCK to teach scientific topics.

According to the teachers, if they did have the opportunity to participate in curriculum development, they would suggest content that is relevant to both boys and girls and include topics such as family, animal, food, daily routine, healthy habits, clothes, and sport. Additionally, teachers suggested topics dealing with technology such as smartphones and iPads. Sharpe (2001) stated that an MFL primary curriculum should be based on materials, which are relevant to children and also related to the pupils' immediate personal experience.

Surprisingly, teachers asserted that the content should reflect the Omani culture. Teachers from the three regions critiqued some content represented in the textbooks, which did not take account of Omani culture.

Laila [m] noted that: *'There is a topic about Olympic day and they mention different players from other countries. Why don't they include Omani players who participated in the Olympic Games? This topic is interesting and it will be helpful if they include Omani participants'*.

Bdoor [d] pointed out that introducing relevant culture to students can offer opportunities to use the language with enjoyment in the classroom: *'Introducing Omani culture in the curriculum will create more exciting, engaging and relevant learning'*.

Teachers from region [s] suggested topics about famous people, places in Oman, mosques, national days, and food.

It is interesting to note that, teachers reinforced the importance of teaching culture, in particular, Omani culture. Teachers may think that learning cultures of different countries was not an easy area which can negatively affect learners' learning. It would also suggest that teachers may have limited subject pedagogy knowledge about teaching other cultures in MFL. With regard to introducing culture knowledge in the curriculum, Abrar a SET [m], argued for a focus on Omani culture in addition to other cultures in the world: *'I think Omani culture should be inserted in some way in the book, and also be complemented by different cultures from all around the world'*.

The main issue here is that most teachers agreed that introducing culture in primary schools was important, but it seemed there is a lack of knowledge about the importance of learning about target language cultures in MFL. This suggests that teachers need to attend training programmes addressing related pedagogy. Learning about culture in MFL has been found to be an important goal in primary level as identified by (Driscoll and Forst, 1999; Field, 2000). It is an advantage to engage children in different cultures to understand practices and customs that happen across societies (Maynard, 2012).

Richard (2003) noted that the content of a foreign language curriculum should receive more attention in terms of usefulness, learnability, frequency, simplicity and authenticity and these points relate closely to the findings above. Providing teachers with manageable curriculum on the one hand and having appropriate content on the other may both have better-supported teachers' curriculum implementation.

In addition to the curriculum content, teachers needed to handle problems relating to inadequacies of the textbook.

4.2.2.2 Inadequacies of the Textbook and Teachers' Book [TB]

- **Unsuitable Activities**

There was general agreement that the textbooks did not provide suitable learning activities for most of the language skills. Nonetheless, it seems that teachers were satisfied with the listening activities in the textbook. Teachers commented that there were different listening tasks across the curriculum. Students have the opportunity to listen to songs, stories and dialogues. Teachers linked sounds with mimes, gestures and facial expressions, which associated meaning (i.e. about characters, emotions and feelings) and brought language to life. The teachers' responses about the listening skill have given an indication of how appropriate tasks supplied by the textbook in addition to teachers' pedagogical knowledge could relieve teachers' anxieties and also support students to make good progress in this skill.

On the other hand, teachers found that the activities for introducing speaking, reading and writing skills were inadequate. For example, some teachers pointed out that the textbooks did not focus on developing the students' speaking skill, as the activities focused heavily on repetition or memorization of dialogues. According to Eman [d], there was no interaction in the language and an absence of discussion exercises or dialogues.

Bdoor [d] expressed the view that *'There was paired work and group work tasks, but these are limited to simple questions and answers. Students do not engage in conversations or express opinions and respond to those of others'*. According to Abrar a SET [m] *'We need activities that involve group discussion and interaction'*. The importance of the pair work and group work, which are likely to provide children with real communication in MFL, was advised by Sharp (2001).

Teachers were also concerned about the writing activities in the textbooks. Badria who was teaching grade 3 explained: *'According to the curriculum, students should make progress in writing. But the curriculum's writing topics are difficult (e.g. describe your friend, write an e-mail, write a recipe). The students have trouble in writing and there is no time to support them'* Badria[m].

Samia also was concerned about her students' reactions to writing tasks: *'the students in my class do not like the writing lesson. They always keep saying we do not like the skills book, we cannot understand and it is hard. Whenever I give them a writing homework, they do not do it'* Samia[m].

The above responses also attract significant attention to challenges about the pedagogy of writing, which can make students frustrated. Jones and Coffey (2013) argued that to support young learners with writing skill they need to start with copying words, colouring, gap-filling, copying sentences, producing words and short phrases etc, but it seemed that the English reform did not provide teachers with appropriate tasks and guidance about teaching this skill.

- **Absence of Activities**

Most teachers believed that pupils performed less well in year 3 and 4 due to the absence of good activities in year 1 and 2. The teachers clearly highlighted the importance of the continuity between grades 1-4 curriculum and they believed that discontinuity could have a negative effect on pupil performance. Eman from region [d] expressed her worries about teaching the joining of letters of the alphabet to her students:

'Joining letters of the alphabet is really confusing. Students were not taught about this style in grades 1 and 2 and even the textbook was not written in this style, so why are students asked to join their handwriting in grades 3 and 4?' A number of teachers from

the region [s] also thought that there were shortages of tasks in the textbook to support the learners to join their handwriting.

Farida[m] explained that her students were not able to write on their own and she was afraid that writing lessons would make her students frustrated: *'Writing ability improves in stages and those children were not encouraged in grades 1 and 2 to write and did not learn to write. However, in grade 3 the textbook tasks ask children to write their own stories. Those students are used to copying, writing words and short phrases only'.*

It seemed that there was a discontinuity between grades 1-4 on issues such as approaches and activities covered regarding the writing skills. However, it is not entirely clear that the effects were always due to discontinuity, they also might have possibly been influenced by a shortage of relevant activities. For example, the teachers found that activities for teaching vocabulary and grammar rules were either missing or did not meet students' needs. Most teachers argued that students did not build enough vocabulary and grammatical concepts in English in grades one and two.

A SET suggested *'If we have 100 words in Grade 1 and gradually we add to this list, when students reach Grade 12 they will have a long list of words'* (Abrar-SET-m). A number of teachers preferred to have an extra word list and to make their own decisions about which vocabulary to teach, as Bushra stated:

'I preferred if I could give my students a different set of words and not depend only on the words which occur in the textbook' Bushra[s].

Bdoor from region [d] thought that some students had enough vocabulary, but they cannot use the words in their writing. It is important for students to be exposed to explicit vocabulary instruction that focuses on the meanings of the words to maximise vocabulary learning, but it seemed that Bdoor's students did not know the meaning of the words; therefore, they were not able to use them in their writing. Research suggests the importance of teaching the meanings of words that children will encounter (Stahl,

1986). It is probably due to the absence of vocabulary activities and lack of PCK that Bdoor was hindered in employing strategies that can lead to create a learning environment where her students feel comfortable while learning vocabulary.

Literature in the teaching of MFL vocabulary to children has a number of recommendations on how to teach vocabulary. For example, the use of games, songs and stories have been found to be important learning activities as argued by Richard (2001), Alexiou (2009) and Chou (2014), whereas Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) suggested that with shared writing sessions teachers can ask students to review vocabulary choices they have made.

In addition to the vocabulary challenge, some teachers were facing difficulties with grammar rules. Bdoor, a teacher of grade, 3 stated: *'In grade two (undeveloped curriculum) the students did not learn any grammar rules, and now in grade three (developed curriculum) there are a lot of grammar rules that are often above their abilities'*. This response suggested that the grammar rules were found useless for grade 3 learners.

Manal also felt that her students were having challenges with grammar *'When I teach an activity and I use WCs and FCs my students participated, but when I teach a writing task or a grammar rule, the students do not participate. I feel that I do not have techniques to make things easier'* (Manal-s). Maynard (2012) identified strategies for teaching grammar to children, such as introducing materials that focus on speaking and listening skills whereby children justify their likes, dislikes on food and describe what others are wearing. According to her, these types of activities help children identify parts of speech in sentences, for example, adjectives and gender/plural agreement.

Although in the discussion above, the focus has been on the absence of activities, if we analyse teachers' responses, we realise that teachers lack the pedagogical strategies and practices that must be employed in MFL classrooms. The success of

teaching in MFL classrooms depends on the teacher's pedagogy content knowledge and subject knowledge (Shulman, 1986; Richard, 1998; Woodgate-Jones, 2008).

- **Lack of Guidance in the Teachers' Book [TB]**

While teachers related the challenge of teaching the 'shared writing' to lack of time, Abrar a SET, related this to inadequate guidance in the teacher's book (TB):

'Shared writing was a new technique, and I think it should have clear steps in the Teacher's Book [TB], because if teachers do not see these in the book, they could ignore them, and they are not going to apply it in the correct way. This technique has benefits and worth because the students develop their writing skills' (Abrar -SET-m).

Teachers in the three regions thought that due to lack of guidance in the TB they had to make their own decisions about how best to teach some activities and meet their students' needs. For example, a teacher who had been teaching for seven years knew that the guidance in the TB did not help her in teaching the reading time lesson (see introduction 1.2.1) and she tended to plan her own way:

'I sit with the learners who are having difficulties in reading, and we read the first page of the story together. Then they have to write the new words in their notebooks. At home, they have to search for the meaning of the word. Many students in my class have improved in reading and in learning vocabulary by using this way'. Samia's knowledge and her autonomy seem to have led to more effective teaching and according to her responses, her students benefited greatly from her decision making.

Samia was able to identify what problems her students faced, and how they could be solved. Her techniques and specific instructions helped her students to do well and make progress. Without Samia's support, her students will not be able to achieve success in reading activity on their own. Samia's support illustrated scaffolding and Vygotsky's (1980) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Ameera also was worried about lack of guidance in the TB for teaching grammar rules and she planned her own activity and put most stress on her students to work out the meaning and the rules of the grammar for themselves: *'Every day when I enter my class, the first thing I do, I write a sentence on the board and ask the students to correct the sentence. They have to look for grammar, spelling and punctuation mistakes'* Ameera [m]. According to Ameera, the students were struggling at the beginning and she used specific instructions until they started to make progress and she became less specific in her help.

As we have seen earlier, Ameera takes a similar approach to Samia who created her own teaching and learning strategies for developing reading skills. Both teachers supported their students, used scaffolding, and the ZPD. These teachers were also able to use their PCK that suited their student abilities and they knew that their own strategies were better than the strategies provided by the TB guidance. This finding suggests that teachers need to be granted pedagogical flexibility in the teaching of curriculum content. Teachers do need the flexibility to use their professional judgements and to make their own decisions to promote professionalism (Hargreaves, 1997; Storey, 2009).

4.2.2.3 Lack of Resources

There are different kinds of resources that can be used in MFL classrooms by teachers and learners (Jones and Coffey, 2006; Kirsch, 2008). These materials are used to enhance students' motivation and learning effectiveness. As the analysis of the interviews revealed, the teachers faced various difficulties with the limited classroom materials. Most of the teachers commented that their classrooms lacked technology resources yet felt that it was important to have these. They needed *Proximas* and interactive whiteboards. According to the teachers interviewed in the second phase of the research, *Proxima* is perfect for teaching young learners and also saves time in

teaching. As discussed in the methodology chapter, phase 2 teachers were from schools that had previously implemented the integrated curriculum (IC). These schools had *Proximas*, a type of projector where teachers connect it to a computer and they use a CD on the computer. The CD includes all materials in students' class and skills books. Teachers used *Proximas* as presentation tools e.g. to present every single task in students' books. This supported IC classrooms unlike those who followed the 'Basic Education' curriculum, but when IC was abolished (see introduction 1.2.1) teachers rarely used them because the CD included, tasks, photos and illustrations for the old curriculum. Unlike some, IC teachers were privileged because they were provided with all the audio-visual materials needed to teach it.

The supervisors acknowledged that the Ministry of Education had provided the schools with materials such as class books and skills book for students, word cards, flash cards and CDs, but as they explained these were not enough and teachers needed extra technological materials. Some supervisors asserted that some teachers are highly motivated, and wanted to use PowerPoint in their lessons but did not always have access to the right equipment. For example, Badria talked about her experience of using 'powerpoint' in the learning centre:

'You know when you use something new for students, they get excited and children of all abilities focus on the lesson. They want to participate, they want to answer, and they want to be the first to finish the activity, so they get excited about the new technology. But we rarely use it because the classrooms lack this resource' (Badria).

According to her, she can rarely take her students to the learning centre because it is the only classroom that is equipped with computers, projectors and a T.V and it is used by the whole school. Furthermore, she said *'Teachers must use a wide range of other learning and teaching resources, such as computers, projectors, TVs and audio-visual aids to listen to the stories'*.

Likewise, Bdoor argued that *'Classrooms should have computers and headphones, especially while teaching the listening skill. Children need to listen to different voices*

to be used to different accents and speeds. We need to teach them to listen to the native speakers because in their final year in Grade 12 they face difficulties in listening exams because they are not used to listening to the different content of the conversation' Bdoor[d]. As Ramage (2012) explains, using a resource such as computers is necessary to teach listening skill because learners can listen to good models of speech.

Teachers also talked about the importance of Big Books (BBs) which are enlarged versions of students' textbooks. According to them, the curriculum department stopped providing schools with this resource. Sara talked about the absence of Big Books and how it was an effective resource for getting young children involved in the lesson:

'We used to have the BBs and it was so helpful, but now with the flash cards, it is not enough. If you ask students to open their books, they will not concentrate on the lesson, and he /she will be flicking through different pages. I think if they provide us with BBs, it will be much better' Sara [m].

Bdoor [d] also highlighted the importance of the resources in teaching English and talked about students' positive attitudes to these lessons: *'Students feel happy when it is an English lesson; even teachers of other subjects know that children like English lessons'*. Analysis of the data revealed that most of the participant's highly rated storybooks. One teacher pointed out that:

'Students really like reading stories, and even the parents are happy about this lesson because their children tell them that they were reading a story in the class' Bdoor [d]. Their only problem is the shortage of storybooks in schools, and sometimes the curriculum department provided the schools with stories that are below the students' linguistic level.

According to teachers' responses, resources are important in teaching English to primary students because they can significantly develop positive attitudes to learning English as an MFL. However, the teachers reported that schools are lacking technological resources which would greatly assist language teaching and learning

and provide access to the authentic target language. An additional advantage noticed by Badria was that technology was helpful in facilitating differentiation in her classroom. Chen, Quadir and Teng (2011) and Macrory, Chretien and Luis Ortega-Martin (2012) stressed the importance of technology in MFL classrooms in terms of learners' motivation, attitudes and engagement, and Jones and Coffey (2013) argued that technology is a powerful learning aid for pupils of all abilities and special educational needs. According to them, technology leads students to engage with the MFL as it combines sound and images, video games and songs.

4.2.2.4 Lack of Guidance with Differentiation

In addition to concerns related to resources, teachers also faced challenges in meeting the needs of children with different ability levels. For example, Kefah [m] commented: *'We have different levels in the classroom, and the teacher must try to explain the material in a creative way and give the necessary guidance to help children of all levels overcome their problems'*. She then elaborated further about how slow learners differ from very able learners:

'Most of the teachers are having a bit of difficulty with slow learners because they need more time to provide them with clear explanations and instructions. I cannot give students more practice while working with thirty within the class. Slow learners need more time and very able ones need more advanced activities; I really need an assistant to help me in the class'. This result may be explained by the fact that the overloaded curriculum reform, a lack of resources, and increasing demands on teachers have affected them to such a degree that they failed to support students of differing abilities in the classroom.

Some teachers asserted that they needed to learn different techniques and processes to follow to help children of all levels of ability in the class to grasp new concepts. Other

teachers argued that the curriculum lacked flexibility in its activities to those with additional support needs and those who are particularly able.

According to the above responses, it seemed that teachers wanted the policymakers in the Ministry of Education to either provide them with guidance on how to support all levels of ability in their classrooms or to provide them with a more flexible curriculum where they can implement their own teaching approaches and materials. The data also suggest that teachers needed to learn pedagogical methods to meet the needs of all students. This might suggest that teachers needed in-service training to be able to apply principles of good primary pedagogy to teach a modern foreign language (MFL) (Sharp, 2001). In addition to challenges with differentiation, the assessment also presented certain issues.

4.2.2.5 Problems with Assessment

The Ministry of Education (2011/12) assessment handbook has provided a framework for teachers to use. According to this, grades 1 and 2 should be assessed by a form of continuous assessment (e.g. observation, and participation in class) while with grades 3 and 4, in addition to continuous assessment, teachers should use short tests and quizzes. According to the assessment handbook, teachers have the freedom to prepare three class tests per semester but there is no prescribed assessment task to follow. Each test focused on two different elements (e.g. listen and read; listen and write and read and write) and speaking was assessed on the basis of continuous assessment.

All the teachers in the three regions carried out three short tests per semester with grades 3 and 4. Some teachers worked independently to prepare their own tests and other teachers worked with colleagues. Interestingly, there were similarities in the three regions about how teachers plan their assessment activities. According to their responses, in order to assess reading skills, they gave students questions with optional

multiple choice answers that focused on reading. To assess the listening skill teachers also used optional multiple choice answers that focused on listening. Some teachers read the listening text themselves, and others used the CDs. The writing skill was mostly assessed based on a judgement of handwriting in their exercise books and writing in their homework. To assess speaking skills teachers make judgements on pupils' responses in normal classwork e.g. describing a picture story, pair and group work and discussions.

It is worth noting that some of the teachers' planning for these tests was at odds with the assessment handbook. For example, according to the assessment handbook, (1) the prepared test should focus on the curriculum objectives in terms of listening, reading and writing, (2) the test should include both easier and challenging tasks and the instructions should be clear for the learners, and (3) writing skill should be assessed using a rating scale. However, most of the teachers' responses confirmed that they did not focus on relevant outcomes nor the rating scale. They were making their own decisions about how best to assess their students' achievements and then they filled the rating scale sheet (see Appendix 15). Teachers' interviews suggested that there was confusion about assessment design and purpose, and teachers did not receive adequate guidance from the assessment department.

- **Confusion about Assessment Design and Purpose**

Although teachers were using short tests, they held concerns and negative attitudes towards this kind of assessment and they preferred to use continuous assessment instead of these. Some teachers believed that, because the tests did not have clear criteria and did not encourage pupils' learning, they were not useful. The following illustrated teachers' attitudes to this type of assessment.

Badria a grade 3 teacher claimed that neither she nor her students understood the purpose of these tests: *'There is no purpose to these assessments. We prepare them, mark them and then we move on to the next unit. If the student's mark was 1 or 10, the students do not care'* Badria [m].

It also seemed that Ameera neither knew the purpose of the assessment nor what were appropriate tasks within it: *'Because the total of the class test is 30% and continuous assessment 70%, I am preparing easy tests, so the students will be able to get good marks'* Ameera [m].

Bdoor also explained how her students do poorly in tests: *'My students are good in participating in class, but most of them do not do well in the short tests'* Bdoor [d]. There are a number of possible explanations in relation to students' poor results, e.g. the test was not inclusive of all abilities or the students were not able to understand the purpose of the questions. *'The primary principle of assessment is that it should be fit for the purpose intended'* (McIntosh, 2015:22). We must argue that teachers' problems were preparing tests that were not directly linked to the curriculum objectives.

Similarly, teachers also expressed concerns about the purpose of the projects and portfolios which could be considered as part of continuous assessment and were unsure about how to award marks according to the relevant rating scale. By consequence, most of the teachers did not use the scales. Only two teachers used portfolios as an assessment tool.

It became clear from teachers' focus group interviews that they were depending on day-to-day observation and classroom questioning (e.g. continuous assessment) and they thought that other types of assessment e.g. short tests, portfolios and projects were unnecessary. One could argue that concerns about short tests were more related to lack of expertise about constructing tests, and concerns about projects and portfolios could be related to the little understanding that it is a part of learning process. Teachers do need to know that both projects and portfolios are good assessment methods for

giving formative feedback. As Jones and Coffey (2013) argued, teachers should select techniques that focused on motivating students, challenging, and provide opportunities for feedback. Indeed formative assessment has been recognised as a valuable method in MFL as it offers feedback about what students can do and how to make progress (Brookhart, 2010; Lee, 2011).

- **Lack of Guidance from the Assessment Department**

Although The Ministry of Education (2011-12) assessment handbook offered teachers guidelines about different ways of gathering information about student learning and contained strategies for conducting the assessment, it was surprising that teachers from the three regions did not seem to have accessed this. It was surprising that, although this handbook existed, strangely it did not arrive in schools. This may relate to inefficient communication between schools and the assessment department. Teachers did not feel supported with how to use the rating scale effectively and they did not feel that it clearly reflected the child's attainment, particularly in terms of knowledge, concepts and skills. Eman [d] argued that: *'I think it is missing something, we are following the documents that were provided by the assessment department, but it does not assess students' learning outcomes'*.

If teachers did not have the opportunity to use the assessment handbook and if some of them were not familiar with the learning outcomes in the curriculum and they were unfamiliar with appropriate methods and question types for students of all abilities, there is a danger in relying on teachers' practices of using tests from different resources. It seemed that teachers lack understanding about the main purpose of a test, which is to assess the abilities and knowledge of the students (Barnes and Hunt, 2003). Teachers must know that, although it is important to take care in designing these tests, providing information which is clear, reliable and free from bias (McIntosh, 2015:22) and its purpose matters most. McIntosh (2015) offered useful principles (see

Chapter 2), pointing out that before designing an assessment method, teachers should ask themselves seven questions. Some of his principles supported the above points.

Omani teachers need to translate McIntosh's (2015) principles into practice to understand that assessment should be used to support learning as well as to understand the unique relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (Hayward, 2013). According to Hayward (2013), curriculum explains what is to be learned, pedagogy explains how learning is positioned, and then the role of assessment is to collect evidence to support learning.

It is important for teachers to have knowledge about what outcomes they are seeking as a result of students' learning in relationship to grade 3 and 4 curriculum reform. To do this, teachers should firstly have access to the assessment handbook as it provides information about how to keep informal records about individual students, follow up actions, and how to provide students with useful feedback. This handbook also supports the vision of the curriculum reform so that students will be able to develop their learning skills and attitudes and transfer thinking skills from the mother tongue to English (Ministry of Education, 2012). Second, teachers need to be trained about how to focus on particular key learning outcomes and to learn how to use rating scale and mark sheets. Finally, as Shaaban (2001) suggested, it is important for teachers to be clear that the success of any evaluation depends on the selection and effective use of suitable tools and methods, as well as the correct interpretation of student achievement.

In summary, teachers in the three regions should understand that assessment may serve different purposes for different people and groups e.g. parents can know their children's strengths and weaknesses, teachers can understand their student performance and different educational organizations can know how teachers were using formative assessment to support teaching and learning (McIntosh, 2015).

4.2.2.6 Parents Cannot Help with English

Another theme emerging from challenges faced by teachers was a lack of support at home. In Oman, it is common practice for families to be involved in their child's education and they help children with school homework in all school subjects. However, there was evidence that parental ability to support children with their English homework is different to other subjects.

Teachers in this study argued that parent support played an important role and had a positive effect on students' English learning. Warda [m] believed that learning English only in the school environment was not enough; therefore, parents' involvement will make a positive difference in students' learning: *'Without parents' help, teachers cannot support those who may need help to overcome barriers of different kinds of challenges in learning English'*. It seemed that Warda wanted the learners to do more work outside the classroom to practise the English and to become less reliant on her.

Both Bdoor and Huda from region [d] appreciated parents who could spend time and get involved with their children's schoolwork. Eman from the same region described parents who help their children at home: *'You can see the students' homework is done, their books and their activities are well organised in their files'* Eman [d].

Some of the teachers in the study observed that students from less privileged backgrounds were less supported than the more advantaged. For example, Badria [m] said that her students were from a poor background and the parents were less able to help their children with their homework:

'Most of my students' parents are often not involved in their children's learning because of their lack of English language knowledge. They do not know what their children are learning and there is little opportunity to hear from them about their children's learning'.

This result seemed to be consistent with other research, which found that parents from

less affluent backgrounds do not support their children with MFL homework (Jones, 2009).

Interestingly, a SET [m] had a different understanding of what parents' support involved *'It is not required from the parents to revise or help their children with their homework; rather they should ensure that their children attend school regularly and ensure that their children keep up with homework'* Abrar.

While many teachers cited the importance of parental support, some said it depends on students' motivation. A senior English teacher stated that *'Above all, it depends on the learners' motivation, and some students work hard without depending upon their parents'* (Abrar-m). Abrar's response referred to intrinsic motivation (Dornyei, 1994) that comes from inside an individual rather than from any external reward such as grades.

However, Fatma [d] felt that parents' support plays an essential role in students' motivation:

'Parents who work together more closely with their children [this] can enhance students' motivation'.

From my point of view, and based on my experience of meeting students' parents and working with English teachers, the Omani people are interested in language learning. Parents were willing to help their children in their learning of English. Given that earlier studies highlighted the benefits of learning an MFL at primary school (e.g. Domínguez and Pessoa, 2005; Harris and O'Leary, 2009; Jones and Coffey, 2013) learning English at an early age has gained interest in Oman. It is important to argue that, whilst some teachers at [d] region thought that parents do not support their students in their homework, their responses were not consistent with data obtained from questionnaire results. This will be examined in section 4.4.

4.2.2.7 Relationships between Teachers and Supervisors

An additional challenge related to curriculum reform manifested itself in relationships with supervisors who were supposed to specifically support teachers with its implementation.

Analysis of the data revealed that most of the teachers that provided responses about 'supervisory relationships' were from regions [s] and [d]. Teachers from region [m] did not express their thoughts about this issue, possibly because they were not facing any problems. Another reason, however, may be that teachers may be not able to give honest feedback because they felt that there may be a risk that the information they provide could be used against them. During the focus group interview with region [m] teachers, the SET was present compared to other regions where SETs were absent (see methodology Chapter, section 3.5). The following section will discuss examples of teachers' concerns about supervisors' roles.

- **Surveillance**

Teachers were complaining and expressed dissatisfaction with the way the supervision worked because it was perceived to be a way of spying on teachers. Ghalia [d] explained how demanding it was for her to see her supervisor coming to the classroom without warning:

'On one occasion I decided not to follow my lesson plan. Suddenly, the supervisor was there at the door of my classroom to observe me. I was in trouble. Why do supervisors not understand that we are not ready to be observed?' Ghalia felt that teachers should know in advance about the supervisor's visit.

It was also frustrating for Ameera that her supervisor was not allowing her to deal with the students in the way she thought fit. In her interview, she asserted that her

supervisor always made negative comments about her practice. In particular, she mentioned that:

'I was asking my students to read some instructions and questions. The supervisor thought that reading long sentences was above the students' level. I have to encourage them to read extended sentences rather than single words'. It seemed that Ameera became anxious due to the fact that she could not use her own teaching and learning methods to increase her pupils' learning: *'I think as long as students can cope and understand me, there is no harm in using whatever I think is suitable for them'.*

From the above evidence, it is clear that teachers were particularly concerned with their supervisors' visits as the above responses suggested that there was no productive engagement, offering guidance, openness and caring. This finding resonates with the work of Zepeda and Ponticell (1998) which found that supervisors were not offering valuable support to the primary teachers. A possible explanation for this might be that overload of responsibilities made supervisors unable to carry out their roles successfully. This issue will be discussed in section (4.3.5).

When asked about curriculum officers, the teachers pointed out that department officials' visits did not focus on discussing curriculum problems, as it was rather administrative in nature. Bdoor [d] in describing this situation, said: *'Their visit is a kind of an inspection visit. We need an opportunity to have a conversation. We want them to listen to us'.* She went on to say:

'Yesterday we had someone from the region m, and he asked about my preparation book, and he was looking at my plans. He said 'why did you finish teaching the curriculum?' You are going fast. I told him that I was trying hard to finish it, and then I will start revising and have more shared reading lessons. He said no, you should not finish it early; children will not come to school if they know they have finished the curriculum'. It seemed that both the supervisors and curriculum officers' visits were a kind of surveillance rather than developmental visits. De Grauwe (2007) described a study of supervisors' official job description in, India, Trinidad and Tabago and

Tanzania. The results emerging show that the attitudes of supervisors when visiting schools were more surveillance than supportive.

- **Harsh and Judgmental Feedback**

Many teachers, from regions [s] and [d], expressed concern that working with female supervisors was hard (harder than working with males). Manal [s], an experienced teacher, did not feel comfortable to share her difficulties in curriculum implementation and she expressed a negative attitude towards her female supervisor:

'I do not tell my supervisor about the challenges in curriculum reform, I cannot tell her. I do not feel she is friendly. It is hard to work with female supervisors, much easier to work with male supervisors'.

The lack of valuable support from female supervisors was also discussed by Eman: *'Even if we talk to her about our difficulties they listen, but nothing changes. She does not provide us with valuable support'* Eman[d]. This suggested that the supervisor's role was not valuable and did not offer teachers any benefits. Not only were supervisors' visits ineffective but also as Nadia[s] believed, female supervision was more to do with judging rather than supporting: *'Female supervisors observed teachers in order to catch their mistakes'*. These results were in agreement with those obtained by Williams and Locke (1999), who found that female subordinates with female supervisors received less guidance, mentoring and support.

Teachers also argued that their female supervisor under-valued and under-appreciated their teaching in the classroom. A contrast was made with male supervisors: *'Male supervisors usually observe how the teaching is conducted and how students participate in the lesson. The male supervisor cares about our teaching in the classroom'* Retaj [d]. According to her, the female supervisor should meet the teachers at the beginning of the year, inform them about what they expect from teachers and

provide them with the needed support to create good relationships and communications.

A close analysis of teachers' responses and in particular, Retaj's response, confirmed a problem of channels of communication between teachers and their supervisors. It is possible that teachers' negative responses about their supervisors might not relate to gender issue rather than it confirmed that teachers disliked the nature of instructional supervision that was carried out in their classrooms. This finding is consistent with those of Sharma et al. (2011) who carried out a study on the nature of instructional supervision in schools in three Asian countries and found that supervisors visited schools to the mistakes and their supervisory approach was administrative and purposive.

- **Inflexibility**

As discussed previously in Chapter 1 (section 1.2.1.1) in Omani state schools, teaching and curriculum content depends on the use of the detailed teachers' books, which provide prescriptive teaching procedures and strategies for individual lessons. Therefore, teachers must demonstrate that they are making appropriate use of these. Despite the importance of the teachers' book [TB], teachers felt that they need to be creative in also making their own judgements.

Bushra asked *'why do we have to follow it step-by-step, if we are allowed to adopt and focus on different issues according to the learners' needs. If we are allowed to introduce extra activities to support students along the way to become better in all four skills'*.

Whilst some supervisors granted permission for making discerning use of TB, the messages were often ambiguous and contradictory. Manal [s] was distressed about

this: *'The situation is frustrating. On the one hand, the supervisor will say it is my decision, and I can adapt. On the other hand, if I am going to change any task, she will ask me why I did not follow the TB'.*

As can be seen, supervisors pay more attention to the TB in the teaching process, while the teachers needed some flexibility in their classrooms. Abrar, a SET, also supported the idea of providing the teachers with flexibility, summed up with a significant point when she said:

'The TB is an excellent teaching aid, and it is a resource for every teacher. The TB gives the chance for all children in Oman to have the same opportunity of learning, and the same opportunity for outcomes in different areas of the country. However, teachers should be given a space to be free to adapt'. The SET's response indicates the importance of providing a written curriculum, guidelines for implementation, but at the same time, providing the teachers with flexibility for implementation.

Teachers also argued that the curriculum should be sufficiently flexible so they can develop their own teaching and learning activities. The majority of the teachers admitted that they knew their students' level, experience, background and needs, and they must have the freedom to make changes when appropriate and not only depend on the teachers' book or students' textbooks.

Although the teachers were asking for flexibility, they also agreed that TB was important and they talked positively about the role of it in delivering the lessons. They used words such as 'a guide, a resource and a framework'. Farida [m] described the TB as a detailed sequence of teaching techniques that tell teachers what to do and when to do it. She also argued that the listening tasks were carefully covered out in detail:

'The TB is a detailed sequence of teaching procedures that tell you what to do and when to do it. In addition, if I do not have the CDs, I can read the listening transcript from TB'. Her response about the listening skill reflected that detailed information is provided by TB for teaching this particular skill. As I have already noted in Section

4.2.2.2, among other skills, teachers did not face challenges in teaching listening. It may be argued that the main reason was that the TB provided teachers with appropriate examples about how this skill should be taught.

The above responses provide plenty of evidence to indicate the advantage of the TB. It seems there were mixed findings, for example, whether to follow the TB to satisfy the supervisors or to follow it due to its effectiveness. It may be argued that there is a need to improve communication skills, understanding and trust in the area of teacher-supervisor relationship. In order for this communication to be successful, it is important that teacher-supervisor interaction considers listening and respecting the thoughts of others (Engin, 2012).

Summary

According to the policymakers, there were some opportunities for teachers to be involved in curriculum development and to attend training. However, this section identified differences between the teachers' and the policymakers' responses. If teachers have had the opportunities to raise their concerns and suggestions and were consulted in curriculum development, it may have circumvented the above challenges. Fullan (2007) noted three components that changes in the curriculum reform will need: curriculum materials, teaching strategies and the possible change in pedagogical assumptions and theories under the new policy. With regard to curriculum materials, all teachers agreed that curriculum content, in the form of the pupils' textbook, was largely inappropriate and contained too many topics. Teachers also believed that there was a lack of flexibility and guidance in the TB and they complained about the lack of technology materials in schools. Findings suggest that policymakers should become more aware of the importance of providing schools with technology materials. The use of technology in primary MFL classrooms was found to be more successful in helping to present the new linguistic and cultural elements (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, idioms, structures and cultural elements) (Gerard et al., 1999).

With regard to teaching strategies, teachers complained about their lack of English language strategies and they do need to attend training courses to be equipped with subject knowledge. With respect to the possible change in pedagogical assumptions and theories under the new policy, the vision of the Basic Education curriculum was:

- 1) to develop a positive attitude to language learning through interesting materials,
- 2) to improve students' skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking,
- 3) to enhance teaching and learning through the use of technology with computers and audio recordings.

(Ministry of Education, 2010)

It is important to note that connections between the vision of the Basic Education curriculum and related pedagogical assumptions are related to the need to engender motivation for English language learning, a need for teachers' high expectations of pupil progress and the willingness to use technology for teaching and learning.

Lastly, this section has shown that teachers desired to improve the interactions with their supervisors through respect, trust and appreciating their work and their performance in the classroom. They also need training about the importance of learning culture in MFL and about assessment issues. This point about professional development programmes for in-service teachers is highly significant and one which the education system in many Asian countries has neglected (Nunan, 2003). In the following section, the researcher will present the findings of teacher training and development.

4.3 The Nature of Training and Supervising Teachers

In this section, I present and analyse data from interviews with trainers and supervisors expressing their views about the effectiveness of in-service teacher professional development programmes for improving English language proficiency and pedagogy for teaching English in primary schools. This section also provides brief descriptions of the trainers' and supervisors' duties and responsibilities to give the reader an insight into the role they play in influencing teachers' curriculum implementation. The section seeks to respond to research question 3.B:

What do the trainers and supervisors think should be considered in the development and delivery of the English curriculum?

The data are presented and analysed in six sections. The first section (4.3.1) discusses issues reported by the trainers surrounding trainers' roles and notions of how training programmes are constructed and organised to serve the curriculum implementation in all regions. The second section (4.3.2) discusses training programmes content and how it supports teachers in curriculum delivery as reported by the trainers and supervisors. Section 4.3.3 looks at views about effective training, whilst section 4.3.4 explores problems with training programmes. Section 4.3.5 looks at another aspect of teachers' preparation: supervisors' roles and their relationship with teachers from the supervisors' perspectives. An important reason for this latter section is the recognition that the supervisors have an essential role to play in supporting teachers with curriculum implementation. The final section (4.3.6) involves trainers and supervisors discussing the importance of working in partnership.

As mentioned previously participants are followed by codes denoting their regions and roles (d= AL Daira region; s= AL Sharqia South region; m= Muscat region; super= Supervisor; tr= Trainer).

4.3.1 Nature of In-service Training Courses in the Three Regions

Before discussing the nature of courses in the different regions, let us have a brief look at trainers' duties and responsibilities. In seeking to investigate trainers' duties and responsibilities, it may be useful first to know about requirements to become a trainer. Aisha said that some of them had previously been SETs, while others were supervisors. They had been selected by senior supervisors in their regions. To be eligible to be a trainer, they should have high English scores on their reports and excellent performance over the last two years noted on their records. Two trainers in this study had Master's degrees from Leeds University in the UK. The three trainers described their roles, which can be summarised as (1) designing training materials, (2) delivering in-service training programmes, (3) conducting workshops, (4) evaluating the courses and writing reports, and finally (5) visiting the teachers in their schools. In Oman, trainers' roles have been to train both primary and secondary teachers to be able to deliver the curriculum effectively and efficiently in the classroom. They should support teachers to develop and implement the new skills, approaches, strategies and the use of the resources to implement curriculum reform.

- **How the Training is Organised and Conducted and the Benefits for In-service Training**

The three trainers explained that the training materials are designed by teacher trainers in the central training department in the Muscat region. Trainers in different regions receive ready-made notes and handouts for each course. In other words, training courses and documents were organised centrally and cascaded down to the regions. When I asked them whether they have the freedom to conduct training without referring to the central office in Muscat, they explained that if they had made any amendments these had to be sent to the central office for approval. However, they were involved in

writing the centrally produced materials by attending workshops in the Muscat region. One trainer said whenever the curriculum department launches a new reform they contact trainers from all regions to attend workshops where they meet members from the assessment, supervision and curriculum departments and they all decide and agree on the training content.

Zayana, [s] believed that the '*centralised training organisation*' is very helpful and she talked about how centralised training results inequality between all the regions in the country:

'It provides consistency in how in-service training processes are managed across the Sultanate for all teachers'. Maryam pointed to some flexibility, explaining that following the distribution of centrally produced resources, *'We are all allowed, as trainers, to adapt the content of the course to whatever we see as suitable for our teachers' needs'* Maryam [d].

'Sometimes in Cycle 1 and 2 we found that there are some issues which are not addressed in the original materials, so we start to include them in our training' Zayana [s].

Although the original training materials were centrally produced in the training department in the Muscat region, the three trainers were satisfied with this. A possible explanation for this might be that the trainers were happy because they have guidelines but at the same time some flexibility and autonomy to adapt them, as illustrated by Zayana. In other words, trainers were allowed to adapt materials according to their teachers' needs.

The trainers also stressed the overall importance of in-service training programmes that were suggested by the central training department in the Muscat region. Both trainers Maryam[b] and Zayana [s] believed that training helps teachers to teach the curriculum more effectively, which, in turn, helps to improve pupils' results because teachers will be learning new skills and techniques to implement in their classrooms.

Maryam asserted that training enabled teachers to engage more with their teaching and to become more motivated:

'In-service training shows the teachers that we care about their development and progress. This makes them more engaged in their work and more motivated'.

Another trainer also highlighted the following main benefits from training:

'Usually, when you are on a course you have people from different regions with different issues and problems. They come with different experiences despite teaching similar grades. I think it is very important for teachers to be in a community like this. I feel confident; I can share things; I also discover a lot of new practices that I can apply in my own classes'.

A supervisor pointed out that in-service training keeps teachers up-to-date on new research and more: *'Training is playing a vital role for teachers because it helps them to determine their own needs and set up effective professional plans to upgrade their performance. It also helps teachers to remain in touch with up-to-date issues related to teaching, learning and different methods'* Nora [d].

This data highlights that training programmes strive to enable teachers to develop an appropriate understanding of using different methods and skills to teach the curriculum. The relationship between training and delivery of the curriculum is, therefore, an important principle. However, it is important to ensure that learning goals are achieved in these training programmes. In order to be able to achieve the goals effectively, Aisha, a trainer [m], argued that developing an effective employee-training programme was the central training department's priority over the last two years and they were working hard to carefully plan and implement it. Aisha's response confirmed that the training department was carefully planning to conduct courses that could support teachers with curriculum implementation. Issues related to planning courses for second language teacher education was largely advised in the literature see for example (Uysal, 2012).

4.3.2 Course Content within the Three Regions

This section presents the views of both trainers and supervisors. The data is analysed in light of appropriate content for teacher education programmes discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). The nature of in-service professional development programmes and the development of teachers' performance have been discussed both in general and in language education literature. In general, education, as discussed in Chapter 2 (section 2.2), training courses should help the teachers learn new methods skills and knowledge of teaching (Wolter, 2000; Barnett, 2004). In languages education, the emphasis has been on teachers' knowledge, looking at issues such as subject knowledge (Richard, 1998; Richards et al., 2013) and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Studies have also looked at cultural understanding (Woodgate-Jones, 2008; Peiser and Jones, 2013), teacher beliefs and the importance of reflective practice in the field of second language training programmes. Some of these issues are more relevant to the present study and were given consideration in the training programmes in the three regions. The presentation of data is organised in a way that provides examples of the course aims and duration to help the reader understand how such courses were adequate and sometimes inadequate in (1) familiarising teachers with the new techniques and skills and in (2) addressing teachers' needs for implementing curriculum reform effectively.

According to the trainers, there were different in-service courses for Omani primary and secondary school teachers. For example, there was a methodology course that was introduced a long time ago. A language course and a so-called developmental course, which involves training for action research. The latter courses were implemented more recently. Although there were some challenges with these courses, trainers, by and large, believed that the courses in their current form supported primary teachers in delivering the new curriculum.

▪ The Methodology Course

This course was for teachers of grades 1-12 to equip them with pedagogical knowledge. Maryam [d] said this course was for 10 days, with three days intensive and then once a week. Maryam talked about the aims of the primary teacher's course (cycle 1 grades 1-4):

'The course focuses on different aims. For example, how to deal with young learners, how to deal with individual differences and mixed ability classes. In addition, how to teach songs, games and spelling by using examples from the class book. Our focus is on the idea that children are learning more by doing'.

In addition, to the above Zayana [s] argued *'In the methodology course, we introduce the different skills reading, writing, listening, and speaking as well shared reading and shared writing. This course is usually for new teachers, but experienced teachers can attend the course as a refresher course too'.*

For Sabra [s] a supervisor, the methodology course was significant for the teachers in her school because teachers learnt to design activities and materials, were able to manage classes, deal with challenging behaviour and to implement the new strategies in the curriculum.

One important type of in-service course for MFL teachers discussed in the literature is precisely this type (Sharp, 2001; Jones and Coffey, 2013), i.e. ones that help teachers to become more familiar with appropriate teaching approaches that work for all children and support the implementation of the curriculum.

▪ The Language Course

The trainers said that the language course was for teachers who needed support with their English subject knowledge. It is delivered over a 22-day period and starts and

ends with 5 intensive days, and in between teachers attended once a week. This course normally entails a number of areas such as communication skills, pronunciation and the four linguistic skills. Lack of subject knowledge was a complaint by the trainers and the supervisors. They expressed concern about teachers lacking subject expertise, particularly primary teachers. They expressed the view that those teaching English are not trained (during pre-service) with adequate subject knowledge. In order to meet the demands of the new reform, trainers and supervisors believed that good linguistic competence, including phonics and communication skills, was very important, and that this could be developed by attending training programmes. The trainers outlined specific problem areas for some of the primary teachers: *Lack of up-to-date practice in English*. The trainers illustrated that teachers rarely communicate in English in the school environment. *Qualifications are inadequate for many*. Some trainers believed that some universities' degree programmes were not adequately equipping trainees with subject knowledge and this situation made many graduates neither able to communicate in English nor to pronounce English words correctly:

'The problem is related to educational organisations such as universities and colleges allowing students to graduate with a low level in the English language' Aisha [m].

A supervisor also argued that: *'Some teachers have difficulties in pronunciation. Bad pronunciation negatively affects students since they are more likely to imitate their teachers'* Sabra [s]. Richards et al. (2013), in their study about teacher professional development languages programme in New Zealand, mentioned how teachers with low subject knowledge were making mistakes with pronunciation for teaching new words. It is recognised that to gain the teaching award, trainees should complete a submission which demonstrates their achievement of qualified teacher status (Alibaba Erden and Ozer, 2013). According to them, qualified teacher status is subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge that enable trainees to teach their subject. For Jones and Coffey (2013) primary MFL school teachers need learning as well as training e.g. high levels of competence in the language, not just the methods with which to teach it.

The key issue overall is that there are gaps in primary teachers' English subject knowledge that have occurred for a variety of reasons. Supporting teachers with the above issues can in turn influence curriculum delivery. For example, what students learn is clearly related to what they are taught, which itself depends on teachers' subject knowledge and knowledge of the curriculum.

It seems also relevant to point out the relationship between pre-service and in-service training, which Stuart and Tatto (2000) and Flores et al. (2014) considered to be a continuum process of developing teacher's professional practices. This reinforces the importance of both initial training and continuous in-service training courses that can ensure the implementation of a good quality school curriculum.

Whilst the trainers recognised the inadequacies, they were very keen to support teachers and two trainers explained how they relied on supervisors to nominate teachers to attend the training course:

'Supervisors are the ones who identify teachers according to different areas of needs. Once we have enough lists of names we organise a course centred on a particular topic. Each region has trainers like me and teachers are released for one day from their school to attend the training course' Aisha [m].

'Supervisors attend lessons with teachers so they know their strengths and weaknesses. Supervisors identify teachers who are struggling and send the names to the training department. Sometimes SETs ask teachers if they are interested in attending this course' Zayana [s].

By comparison, Maryam from region [d] adopted a different strategy to identify teachers who lack subject knowledge. She asked all English secondary and primary teachers in her region to sit a placement test to make it easier for her to have the names and the results as a database with her and to know who should attend the course. For Maryam, the organisation of a language course was challenging because she needed to deal with teachers who saw this type of course as a criticism of their subject knowledge:

‘When we started with the language course, the teachers felt a bit reluctant, because people around them would say you are attending this course because you are not good at English’.

Maryam emphasised that it was vital to communicate with those teachers in order to help them build good relationships with the trainers and to motivate them to attend this course:

‘We tried very hard to remove this stigma. We told them the training was for all teachers regardless of their experience or language level. The first year was very difficult and lots of teachers refused to attend, but the following year saw a better turnout’. Maryam believed that courses should be developmental and value individuals and should not be promoted as a corrective measure. An interesting finding was that Maryam avoided the ‘naming and shaming’ approach which could make teachers feel they were identified because they performed badly in their subject knowledge. The strategy Maryam used to know the teachers and the way she communicated with them motivated teachers to attend training. Based on his study with teachers of English, Cheung (2013) found that teachers were more motivated to take part in professional development activities due to strong support from their schools and the Ministry of Education.

One significant reason for the language course conducted by the training department is the recognition that teachers need to improve their subject knowledge. This problem has been explicitly reflected in other research; for example, see section 4.2 when teachers identified their lack of subject knowledge as one of the reasons for challenges in delivering the English curriculum reform. Richards et al. (2013) talked about the role of subject knowledge in delivering rich language input and meaningful clarifications for learners. Richards (1998) also looked at this issue, and in particular, discussed communication skills arguing that teachers’ inability to communicate can lead to a lack of clear explanations for students. The supervisors in this study also point to the necessity of secure subject knowledge for the successful implementation of curriculum reform.

- **The Role of Senior English Teachers [SETs]**

In addition to courses run by trainers for classroom teachers, the trainers also provided courses for Senior English Teachers (SETs). This course prepares SETs for their roles and it lasts eighteen days. Both trainers and supervisors argued that SET has the responsibility to observe the teachers in their classroom and to provide the needed support for curriculum implementation. The SET has daily contact with the teachers and she is the level between the school administration, supervisors, and the teachers. SETs are responsible for supporting teachers in curriculum implementation, establishing goals and objectives for teachers, monitoring students' progress and keeping records about teachers' performance. Because of this, SETs are well trained because they have a significant influence on the teachers. The supervisors explained that:

'SETs are supposed to support the teachers in the school with curriculum implementation and with any issue related to teaching and students' learning' Sabra [s].

'The SETs usually attend most of the in-service training courses and we have the opportunity to meet them a lot. If teachers are experiencing any difficulties in the school, it is the SET's responsibility to inform us' Amal [m].

- **Developmental Courses**

As argued earlier, this has been a course that prepares teachers specifically for conducting action research. The trainers argued that a developmental course is one which addresses particular features and problems teachers experience with the implementation of the curriculum reform. This course supports teachers with the

implementation of the curriculum reform and engages teachers with educational research.

Zayana a trainer [s] expressed the view that this course is one of her favourite courses, implemented for 16 days that starts with 6 intensive days. She argued that, in this course, there should be only 12 teachers because it is a demanding course and teachers need to do lots of assignments and to receive face to face support. She expressed:

'We are hoping from doing this course to spread the knowledge and the experience of doing action research in their classrooms. We want to have reflective teachers. It is an opportunity to have researchers in the schools. Teachers also can present their research in different events nationally or internationally. This course implies a more systematic process of collecting, observing and analysing their thoughts'. An important aim of reflective practice in schools is that teachers think about their teaching, collect and examine information about what goes on in their classroom (Whitton et al, 2004) where they can identify and explore their own practices and underlying beliefs (Farrell, 2008). The value of action research also has been found to be a commitment to personal and professional improvement because it involved teachers researching their own practices (McNiff, 2010).

The above responses showed that regions were implementing a variety of courses to get teachers to learn various types of skills and methods to deliver the curriculum reform as well training teachers to be researchers and to use their research findings as a basis for improving their practices in the classroom.

4.3.3 Views about Effective Training

While there is much agreement about the importance of professional development for in-service MFL teachers (Nikolov, 2000; Nunan, 1997; Rendón, 2002), it is also

stressed that these courses should pay adequate attention to teachers' needs, resources and materials (Uysals, 2012; Karavas, 2014). In contrast to the literature on what constitutes effective training or professional development, the trainers in this study seemed to be highlighting the importance of follow-up. In the following, this issue is explored further.

When trainers were asked about whether they perceived the courses to be effective, Zayana from region [s] and Maryam from region [d] argued that they are using '*end of course evaluations*' where teachers were asked to evaluate the course. Neither trainer thought this type of evaluation was realistic as it did not give information about whether teachers had learnt from the course. They believe that it is important to research the impact of the course on practice in the longer term. In his article, Guskey (2003) discussed what he called 'yes, but . . . statements. He stated that the point is simply that policymakers want easy responses about effective professional development. It is possible that 'end of course evaluations' cannot ensure teacher performance and the trainers in this study seemed to express similar views.

To Zayana it was also important to understand the impact of the course on practice in the short term and she was implementing an additional specified method to evaluate training programmes:

'This method has three parts: the first involves asking the trainer two questions about things she did not address during the course and they would like her to do. The second refers to something I was doing that they liked and want me to continue. The third part asks them about something that they did not like, and they wanted me to stop. Usually, when they say stop this means that I am introducing something which cannot work in their classroom. This last principle is a kind of connecting their classroom practices with what is happening in the course'.

Zayana believed that for any training to be effective it must have an impact on individual development. Therefore, she was sceptical about 'end of course evaluations' forms, as they were not informative about what teachers are actually able to do or how they

will perform in the classroom. According to these data, we can infer that the trainers are adopting strategies to help them meet teachers' needs and they are adapting their courses in light of teachers' feedback:

'It is important to get teachers' feedback, sometimes verbal feedback while we are meeting teachers. With a feedback process, it is easier to understand teachers' needs and to make the required changes that suit the teachers in our region' Zayana [m]. Maryam [d] also commented: *'We structured the courses according to the region's needs, and this makes teachers feel confident, more knowledgeable and skilful in using the resources. It results in better learning outcomes'* It can thus be suggested that trainers believe that adapted courses which respond to teachers' needs have a more successful impact on teachers' practice.

Both Zayana and Maryam also argued that visiting teachers in their schools after the training course is part of effective training. This suggests that following teachers in schools is a type of medium or long-term evaluation where they can investigate changes in knowledge, attitude and behaviour. However, both explained that it was impossible to visit all teachers in the schools after each training course. Maryam reported that following the teachers after the training constituted another challenge for her due to a shortage of trainers in her region; therefore, asking for supervisors' support was an alternative option:

'Usually, supervisors know what I am doing in the training course because some of them attended some of my courses. They visit schools and observe teachers, and then they provide me with feedback on teachers' performance'.

Although she stated that supervisors informed her about teachers' performance, she reinforced the importance of visiting teachers herself as there was some evidence about teachers facing difficulties with some of the new suggested approaches. She noticed that some teachers were struggling with some issues e.g. in terms of implementation of a more child-centred approach, Zayana also noticed that some teachers had difficulty with teaching shared writing.

'Teaching writing is a disaster, especially shared writing because most students have not been previously prepared in advance in writing. Consequently, students copy from the board or give such writing to their parents to finish the homework. There is a quick jump from writing words and sentences to writing paragraphs and students haven't received that much support from grade 1 and 2 in literacy. Children need to learn about conjunctions and prepositions' (Nora-super-d).

In general, therefore, it seems that these trainers knew that some teachers were not confident in delivering new approaches in the curriculum reform, and by not visiting and supporting them in the classroom; teachers may fail to deliver the curriculum successfully. It is interesting to note that both trainers believed that without their follow-up it is doubtful that successful implementation will occur. A supervisor also supported this point of view and emphasized the importance of 'follow-up' to help reinforce the changes in teachers' methods and strategies: *'Some teachers have a problem with curriculum implementation and they have no intention of changing anything after attending the training, therefore, follow-up is required in order to overcome teachers' problems'* Amal [m].

On the other hand, for Aisha from region [m], effective training was in the form of a cascade model and she referred to the supervisors' and SETs' roles in this process. Supervisors also played an important role in feeding back to the trainers: *'Supervisors also attend the training. They will have an idea about the new reform, new ideas and strategies. So when they visit schools, teachers in the schools would know all about the issues around the reform and they can inform me about any issues'*.

Aisha also talked about the SET as another important source to help teachers in the implementation of the new reform. She explained how to make sure that SETs after attending the training programmes should have access to the training material such as handouts of trainer guides, CDs and textbooks. This region thought that preparing training materials for SETs will help to apply a 'cascade model' in an effective way. This finding would seem to concur with the view of Elder (1996), who suggested that if

a cascade model can be delivered in an exciting way and incorporates monitoring and evaluation to track development and outcomes.

Aisha discussed how they equip SETs with the activities to run the training:

'We are not only asking the senior English teachers to attend the training programmes, we actually prepare all needed materials for them. They go back to their schools with the well-planned package. This package consists of all the materials that a senior English teacher needs to run the workshop'.

She also explained the need to use the cascade model in her region due to large numbers of teachers, as it was not possible to train all teachers: *'we cannot train all the teachers in Oman; there are thousands of them. We train only the SETs from each school and all supervisors'.* This concurs with Elder's (1996) point that a cascade model can be an effective strategy to reach out to more teachers.

The shortage of trainers was another area of concern that had not yet been rectified. Aisha stated the lack of trainers in the regions was a barrier in training more teachers: *'There are not enough trainers across most regions. They have dropped out to work in other jobs. However, training may be a challenge if we want more teachers to be trained'* Aisha [m].

While this region was complaining about the large number of teachers, another region shared a different view as Maryam [d] asserting that *'I have fewer teachers in my region, so I talked to the central office in the Muscat region and I told them the capacity of my group and I can deliver courses to all teachers and SETs'.*

From the above findings, we can argue that region [m] has lots of teachers compared to other regions, therefore, only SETs and supervisors attend the training. Drawing on Aisha's response, it can be assumed that there were some concerns about the cascade model. In order to implement effective training for teachers, it did not mean

only providing SETs with materials, but SETs should be able to run the workshop to support teachers in curriculum implementation.

Zayana [s] indirectly critiqued the cascade model by drawing attention to the fact that, it was not achieving the outcomes:

‘Some teachers did not attend my training, and teachers were struggling to implement the new skills of the reform. I do not know how they do that and how effective it is. I think the cascade model did not work for those teachers because the skills and information were not passed on clearly’.

These results match those observed in earlier studies. In his paper, Story (2009) examining training programmes with primary and secondary schools in England, found that the participants who attended training and were asked to train other teachers lack the experience, which results in fewer quality outcomes. Elder (1996:15) advised that to overcome cascade model difficulties, there is a need for ‘establishment of a national team responsible for all aspects of training’. The main issue Elder (1996:13) recommended was the importance of enhancing ‘uniformity and sustainability’ of various departments in the Ministry of Education. Although the trainers argued earlier that when introducing new reform, trainers, supervisors and members from the assessment and curriculum departments attend workshops to agree on the training content, SETs do not appear to be attending these meetings. Another important finding was that not all departments were involved with the cascade model. For example, lack of knowledge about assessment was previously highlighted in teachers’ interviews (see 4.2.2.5), and the assessment department did not seem to make any contribution to the training programmes. In the following section, some of the challenges with training programmes are explored.

4.3.4 Problems with Training Programmes

As has been noted in the above sections, the introduction of various in-service teachers' training programme was an important aim of the training department to support teachers in implementing the curriculum reform. Effective professional development programmes, however, involve more than different types of training programmes. They require careful planning (Uysal, 2012) and proper implementation. For Garton (2014), even when professional development courses were implemented, there was a misalignment between course content and policy goals. One of the challenges expressed by Maryam [d] was the appropriate course content. She argued these courses should not be overly theoretical and should provide teachers with methodologies they can apply to their lessons. Importantly, she has suggested that in-service courses should focus on practical issues and teachers' needs:

'It should not be too theoretical; it should be more practical because teachers are more interested in doing things rather than only listening. The courses should be based on teachers' real needs; unfortunately, most of the training done so far is related to ministry requirements rather than teachers' needs'. Maryam's response referred to an interesting finding; on the one hand, they do conduct in-service training programmes, on the other hand, training was driven by policymakers rather than teachers' needs. These results seem to be consistent with other research, which found that in training programmes for English foreign language teachers the focus was on the theories, and they fail to serve teachers' needs (Meng and Tajaroensuk, 2013).

A similar but slightly different challenge was discussed by Aisha [m]. In particular, she drew attention to the need to connect theory and practice in real teaching. According to her, she focused on this in her region with grade 3 and 4 teachers while introducing the new approaches in the curriculum reform. She felt that teachers were able to apply and test approaches in their classrooms that they had learned throughout the training course. Connecting theory and practice is an issue that is seen less commonly used in the in-service training compared to pre-service courses. In the literature, there is a

considerable amount of discussion about the connecting theory with practice for pre-service teacher training (Smedley, 2001; Thompson and Crooner, 2001). However, according to Aisha, there is also a need to develop this with the in-service training programmes.

Attendance was also an area of concern. Many trainers and supervisors discussed teachers' lack of attendance at training courses. In fact, there was a strong perception that teachers were not motivated to participate in professional development. Zayana [s] explained that unfortunately, teachers were less aware that training can help them learn the strategies needed to undertake the teaching of the curriculum:

'Some teachers are not very keen to attend any training programmes, and they make excuses such as there is a lot to do in schools [...] From training, they identify the best methods and techniques needed to teach the curriculum'. The workload in schools as Sandholtz (2002) argued can be an issue that affects teachers' motivation to take part in professional development training.

Aisha also implied that workload may impact on attitudes to courses. She thought that some teachers attend just to meet other teachers *'[...] some of them view the workshops as a break from classes. The courses give them a chance to chat; it is like a short holiday. Teachers should have the motivation and willingness to attend training in order to get the full benefit of the course'.*

There were similar concerns from a supervisor who thought that teachers view training more as *'optional rather than essential'* which suggest that teachers have the right to opt out:

'In the past, schools used to receive a letter with the teachers' names who were required to attend, so teachers knew who was to attend. Nowadays, whoever wants to attend should come, but sometimes we have teachers who need those courses, and they refuse to attend. We cannot force them, but I do not think this is a good way of doing things' Sabra [s].

In her view, teachers' desire to attend training and to learn is significant in influencing the quality of their teaching in the classrooms:

'Many teachers do not have a passion for learning new techniques. I know many teachers who attended training and they came back without any improvements in their teaching and do not try to implement the new learning and teaching practices in their classrooms'. This finding is contrary to previous studies which have shown the effectiveness of in-service teachers' training in improving teachers' professional skills and teaching methodology (Shah, Mahmood, and Hussain, 2011).

There are several possible explanations for this result. It is possible that the training content did not address the specific needs of the teachers. Another possible explanation for this is that training was not carried out well, which led to a failure of learning new teaching practices and skills. Failure to adequately train teachers can be a reason for the inadequate implementation of the curriculum.

There are, however, other possible explanations related to teachers' beliefs. It is possible that teachers did not change their practices after attending the training because they hold beliefs that guide their practice and serve them and their students (Opfer, Pedder, and Lavicza, 2011). In arguing for the place of exploring teachers' beliefs in training programmes, we need to know how their beliefs shape their practices, and this is another challenge that is explored in the following responses.

Maryam seemed to recognise the influence of teachers' beliefs on their practice:

'If we want teachers to be engaged in any kind of reform and to feel that they are part of it, we need to explore their beliefs and attitudes towards learning and teaching in general from the first day of the training course'. According to Maryam, teachers come to training programmes and they have their own kinds of knowledge that are valid for their classroom practice. Therefore, in training programmes, it is important to:

'Explore their beliefs by talking and observing them during the session and then gradually we introduce the new practices that teachers should adopt. In this way, teachers can think and examine their existing beliefs and attitudes to guide their

behaviour'. This finding resonates with the conclusion of Sanchez and Borg (2014) who established that teachers were likely to use techniques that aligned well with their beliefs. Maryam also explained that teachers hold beliefs about their important role in curriculum development. I dealt with this idea in greater detail in section 4.2.1 of this chapter. The key issue to note here is that it is important to encourage teachers to examine their beliefs to guide their future actions (Farrell, 2006).

While trainers had an important contribution to make in supporting teachers with the curriculum implementation, supervisors also provide ongoing guidance to teachers and provide them with the information they need to teach the curriculum reform and this is discussed in the next section.

4.3.5 The Role of Supervisors in Curriculum Implementation

Providing teachers with the support needed to improve classroom practices and working as a liaison agent between the education system and the school administration are the functions of the school supervisors (De Grauwe, 2007). In addition, the controlling role, as De Grauwe argued was considered to be central to the function of supervision. According to De Grauwe (2007), there were various forms of supervisors' role that have existed in different countries. For example, in Oman, supervisors have a lot of supportive and administrative roles related to school counselling see Chapter 1 section (1.5). In Oman, training programmes, assessment and curriculum departments often lay a great deal of weight on supervisors' role in the schools. This is because supervisors require supporting teachers with curriculum reform and implementation.

This section presents the nature of instructional supervision that is carried out in schools. By considering the data in relation to supervisors' roles that was discussed by

(De Grauwe, 2007) we can explore how teachers were supported or not in curriculum delivery.

- **The Nature of Instructional Supervision**

While interviewing the supervisors, they mentioned that they were senior English teachers (SET) before the transition to the position of supervisor. There were three important steps supervisors should follow to supervise the teachers. These steps support teachers to be able to deliver effective and appropriate content of the curriculum. Firstly, they had a discussion for 3-5 minutes before lesson observations to ask the teachers about the lesson aims and what materials the teacher was going to use. It seems this first step was important; where supervisors can share the learning objectives with the teachers as well discuss concerns or challenges before the classroom visit. However, this step was unlikely to happen when supervisors were suffering the stress of observing more than a teacher in one day:

'Honestly, I did not have time to have a pre-lesson discussion with the teachers, because of the huge number of teachers that I have to observe. Sometimes I have to observe five teachers on one day' Sabra [s].

Following a lesson observation (step 2), as Sabra explained:

'I attend the lesson with the teacher and try to observe what she is doing in the classroom. It is not about identifying mistakes, just a way of helping her to improve. How does she give instructions to students, what is the classroom management strategy? I observe the teaching methods and materials she is using, her instructions, whether she is well prepared or not? Is she aware of the aims that she should be achieving?'

Compared to Sabra, Nora [d] offered a very useful explanation about her role while observing her teachers: *'Finding teachers' strengths and weaknesses in order to*

support them setting up their professional future plans. Focusing on strategies she used to teach the curriculum, e.g. fluency in English, how she is assessing students' learning, and the use of materials. Furthermore, ensure that curriculum outcomes have been achieved'.

Finally, the supervisors discuss the main issues in that lesson with the teacher (step 3):

'In this discussion, I direct teachers towards critical thinking. I also encourage them to set up their own plans based on their own needs. Encourage them to create extra curriculum activities' Nora [d].

Referring to Sabra's and Nora's responses, it seems that Sabra's supervision focused more on evaluating teaching methods, rather than giving systematic lesson guidance compared to Nora who focused on keeping her teachers motivated.

Interestingly, a trainer from region [m] draws attention to a number of factors in the context of the teacher-supervisor relationship: *'In my opinion, teachers need to get good advice and support from who I would call mentors rather than supervisors because supervisors sometimes come and evaluate teachers. Maybe the right word we should use is mentors who act like a critical friend, whom teachers can trust and ask for advice without being frightened'* Aisha. It seemed that the teacher-supervisor relationship was also recognised by this trainer who expects supervisors to strive to make these interactions as productive as possible.

While the three supervisors were keen to visit teachers in their classroom and support them with curriculum delivery, some found the reality more challenging. Supervisors expressed concern about the difficulty to observe and support teachers in the schools, although they have fewer administrative duties. They asserted that they have more than 60 teachers to supervise and it is very challenging. The following quotes are typical examples of participants' responses:

'It is very challenging; we are supposed to supervise 30 teachers, but because we have a shortage of supervisors, we take on extra teachers, above fifty' Amal[m].

'I am a supervisor in eight schools, and I have 65 teachers so it is very difficult. This situation creates great pressure and teachers complained that I am tough' Sabra [s].

There is evidence here that, supervising lots of teachers creates an overload for supervisors. I argued earlier that this supervisor was evaluating only teaching methods while observing her teachers, this may relate to this reason. We noticed from Sabra's response that teachers felt she was hard. This seemed related to Sabra's actions in her classroom observations where teachers felt she was judging rather than supporting. This result seems to be consistent with other research which found that teachers were not satisfied with the way supervision is conducted, because supervisors were in the classrooms to find mistakes rather than supporting and guiding teachers (Sharma et al., 2011).

Although supervisors were not able to visit and support teachers in the schools, they seemed to emphasise the role of the senior English teachers (SET) in this process. As has been noted in the previous section, SET course was one of the important courses conducted by training department. This is because SETs are responsible for supporting teachers in curriculum implementation:

'The SET should follow a certain strategy that directs teachers to be more reflective and critical, so they determine their own strengths and weaknesses. Together the SET and the teacher work on an effective action plan to enable teacher development' Nora [d].

While the SET was responsible for supporting teachers, supervisors recognised that some teachers may struggle and face problems in any area while delivering the curriculum. To address these areas there will be a need to take action to focus on improving teachers' performance. At this situation, the school supervisor is in charge to help teachers improve their skills by visiting those teachers more than once to provide on-going guidance and support:

'If a teacher is experiencing some kind of problems, I and the SET identify these problems. Then, I observe her again and I look at how she implements the ideas we discussed in the post-lesson discussion of the previous lesson' Sabra [s].

'I and the SET try to help the teacher through observing her lessons to provide her with comments regarding her performance, so she can determine her own professional programme' Nora [d].

Despite the significance of the SET's role in supporting teachers in the schools, they cannot replace supervisors in terms of difficulties faced by some teachers. This reinforces the importance of supervisors' visits to schools. Foehrenback and Goldfarb (1990) reported that in terms of receiving information, the supervisor was the most preferred source.

Supervisors stressed the importance of the three steps in terms of (1) providing teachers with the support and information they need to deliver the curriculum and in terms of (2) focusing particularly in relation to helping teachers understand new approaches to the curriculum reform. For example, one supervisor draws attention to teachers facing problems with assessment:

'You know some teachers cannot make a decision about the content that should be assessed. They do not read the assessment document to learn how to assess individual students. Therefore, I conduct a workshop to explain all the information needed in the assessment document. I also provided them with assessment tasks which they can use in their classrooms' Sabra [s]. In contrast to Sabra's view, teachers' interviews (see section 4.2.2.5), highlighted that they have no idea about the existence of the assessment document. Although one of the supervisors' roles was to supply schools with necessary materials, surprisingly, the supervisor had no idea that their teachers did not receive the assessment document. It seemed that supervisors fail to specifically address teachers' needs and that has an impact on teaching the curriculum. Another important finding was supervisors' awareness of the three steps in the supervision setting that can influence teachers' curriculum implementations. It

seemed relevant to point out in order to implement the curriculum effectively the three steps need to be implemented adequately. According to Engin (2012), there is a value in this kind of feedback sessions where teachers are monitoring their performance in the class, reflecting, asking questions and making decisions about their teaching.

Visiting teachers in schools and supporting them was one of the supervisor's roles as explained by the supervisors, but according to the above data as De Grauwe (2007: 11) argued there is 'blatant discrepancy between official job description and supervisors' daily task'. From this, we can understand that, if supervisors were not performing their roles as they were supposed to, there was no doubt that this process can lead to a lack of relationships between supervisors and teachers as already discussed in the previous section.

4.3.6 The Importance of Working in Partnership

The partnership is about developing inclusion. It is an effective relationship within and across organisations. As the findings revealed, none of the supervisors and only one trainer had been directly involved in curriculum development. As one trainer explained: *'Trainers need to be involved and informed of why the reform is there and how important the reform is because if we understand it, then we can transfer it to the teachers and whenever we discuss issues with teachers we can always answer their questions'* Maryam [d].

When asked about how they learn about new developments in the curriculum with training implications, Zayana argued: *'We have a chance for one day to meet with a committee to learn what to deliver, but it is not enough, we have to be involved in the process. I think we should be a part of it. I don't know why we are not?'*

Aisha who was the only trainer who has been involved in Grade 4 development pointed to the advantage of that experience: *'I really enjoyed being with the committee, it was a good chance for me, and it was a kind of an addition to my CV. I was given the chance to say what I thought is suitable for students' needs, and we did share the different skills and knowledge'.*

Maryam stressed the need for collaboration in curriculum development not only between all the departments but also to include schools: *'I think everybody from different departments and schools should be involved in curriculum development. Working in partnership means they are all partners in the planning of the curriculum decision, therefore, their ideas, skills, experiences and suggestions will play an active role in the quality of their decisions'.*

The finding here is that one day of meeting with a committee will not provide the trainers with the skills and knowledge to conduct the training successfully. They need to inspire trainees and provide them with needed materials and explanations on topics that aren't being understood. It is worth noting at this point that teaching communities, as well as curriculum officers, should be gathered around a table working enthusiastically to address curriculum development issues.

Summary

There were a number of training programmes in the three regions, aiming to support English teachers to become more efficient and productive in delivering the curriculum. The positive effects of training programmes on MFL teachers were also recognised by Hu (2007) and Sharp (2001), who expect teachers to improve their skills and abilities by attending these courses. This highlighted the impact of in-service professional development courses on curriculum delivery.

The first section has shown that in terms of implementing different courses, trainers re-enforce the importance of the language course. With reference to trainers' responses about teachers' lack of subject knowledge, they pointed to problems with their initial training programmes. This makes it clear that pre-service training is important as it can influence teachers' literacy and phonetics (Richard, 1998). This section then reflected on different views about effective training, and as we saw, there were significant differences between the three trainers. Two trainers seemed to point to the importance of 'follow up' training where they can see the impact of the course on teachers' attitudes and behaviour. This issue received little attention in the literature especially in the area of MFL classrooms. In contrast, Aisha [m] pointed to the importance of the 'cascade model' to reach out more teachers in her region. In contrast, Zyana and Maryam argued this model was not successful enough to support teachers in curriculum implementation.

In this section, the trainers also identified a number of problems that occurred in the training programmes. On the one hand, there were various types of courses to support teachers with curriculum reform, while at the same time policymakers paid little attention to teachers' needs. Not responding to teachers' needs can result in low attendance at these courses.

Also, the trainers and supervisors pointed to the importance of their contribution in curriculum development. As Maryam argued different departments in the Ministry of Education and schools need to be working in closer alignment.

Lastly supporting teachers to work towards achieving the curriculum reform outcomes and goals should not stick to the guidance of the training department only, but also assessment and curriculum departments should participate. In other words, the main point noted is the importance of realising that in-service training is not the mission of one individual organisation (Shah, Mahmood, and Hussain, 2011), but working as a team for common goals that support curriculum implementation.

4.4 Questionnaires

This section addresses the fourth research question:

What are the perspectives of students and parents with regard to learning English as a modern foreign language?

This section contains views of both students in Grades 3 and 4 (age 8-9) and their parents regarding learning English as a modern foreign language (MFL) in the Muscat and AL Dahirah regions. As explained in Chapter 3, a total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to 10 schools, 5 schools in each region. However, in total, only 361 (72.2% return) questionnaires were received from students and 317 (63.4% return) of these also contained responses from parents of both regions (see Figure 4.1).

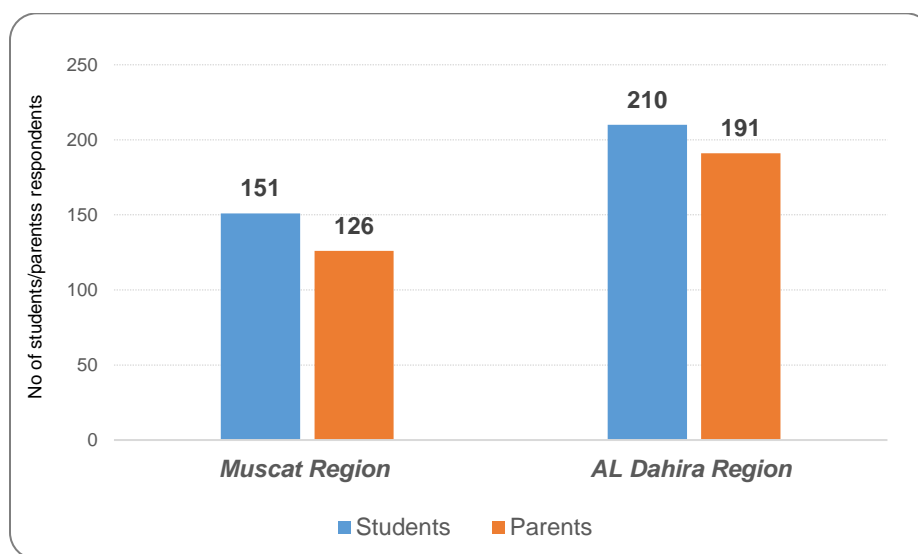


Figure 4.1: Frequency of Respondents (students/parents) from Both Regions

Findings are reported by presenting the child questionnaire and interview data results first followed by data from parents. The first section of the questionnaire contained 17

statements (see Table 4.1), which asked students for their views about learning English. The first section began, however, with demographic variables of the sample such as year group and gender to correlate with other responses to assess for any influence on the research findings. This section also posed questions about attitudes to learning English and opinions about the receptive and productive skills. The second section of the questionnaire contained questions for parents to express their opinions and offer feedback about the English curriculum reform for grades 3 and 4. Trends emerging from the questionnaire were explored in greater depth through one-to-one interviews (n=13) also with pupils of grade 3 and 4. In exploration of the interview data, the researcher will focus on two particular issues: attitudes about English lessons, and the purpose of learning English as an MFL. In the analysis of both themes, I draw on the work of Dörnyei (1994) on motivation in second language learning as reviewed in Chapter 2. Dörnyei's framework enables an analysis of pupils' views in relation to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1994).

In general, the results indicated that Omani students as well their parents have positive attitudes towards English as an MFL. The results also showed that students, in particular of AL Dahira region, received more support from their parents with their homework. The findings also revealed that very high levels of intrinsic motivation were found.

Table 4.1: Percentage of the Muscat Region and AL Dahira Region Grade 3 & 4 Students' Responses

Students	Muscat Region %			AL Dahira Region %		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not Sure</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>
I find English lessons interesting and fun	88.0	2.7	9.3	90.5	3.8	5.7
I know a lot of English vocabulary	61.3	6.0	32.7	58.6	16.2	25.2
I am learning lots of new things in English lessons	88.7	2.0	9.3	85.2	7.1	7.6

I have lots of activities to do in English lessons	74.0	6.7	19.3	68.6	14.8	16.7
I am making good progress in English lessons	78.0	5.3	16.7	75.7	8.1	16.2
I enjoy reading time in English	84.7	3.3	12.0	82.9	9.0	8.1
I am getting better at reading this year	83.3	5.3	11.3	75.2	8.6	16.2
I am getting better at shared writing this year	77.3	4.7	18.0	73.3	8.6	18.1
I think I can write a short sentence on my own	77.3	8.0	14.7	66.7	12.4	21.0
I like speaking activities in English	75.3	7.3	17.3	74.8	10.5	14.8
I like spelling in English	80.7	12.0	7.3	81.0	12.4	6.7
I like playing English language games most	90.7	4.7	4.7	91.4	5.7	2.9
I like listening to songs and rhymes in English	76.0	6.0	18.0	72.9	18.1	9.0
Listening to stories in English are my favourite	90.0	3.3	6.7	75.7	11.4	12.9
Learning through group work in English makes learning fun	78.7	4.7	16.7	89.5	4.3	6.2
My teacher helps me when I get stuck in English	84.7	4.7	10.7	93.3	6.2	0.5
I always do my English homework alone	72.7	9.3	18.0	51.0	21.9	27.1

4.4.1 Findings from the Student Questionnaire and One-to-one Interviews

- Pupils' Questionnaire: Year Group, Gender and Region of the Students

Interestingly, as can be seen in Figure 4.2 the majority of respondents were girls 58.2% compared to the boys 41.8%. The results here also showed that the 57.1% of the respondents were from grade 3 and 42.9% were from grade 4. Although the reasons for refusal to participate are not known, lack of confidence may be a reason for the lower response from year 4 in this study. This interpretation is based on the fact that I noticed while distributing the questionnaires, that some of the grade 4 students thought that I was a native English speaker and they were shy to speak to me. Most teachers, as revealed in section 4.2.2.2, did not think that the English curriculum provided suitable learning activities for developing communication and writing skills. Therefore, Grade 4 students may not have felt confident to participate to avoid speaking with me or writing in English.

Another important finding was that there were more responses from AL Dahirah region compared to the Muscat region (see Figure 4.2). Despite the support I received from the Muscat region, teachers of AL Dahirah region were more interested in my research and were, therefore, more enthusiastic in reminding the students to return the questionnaire.

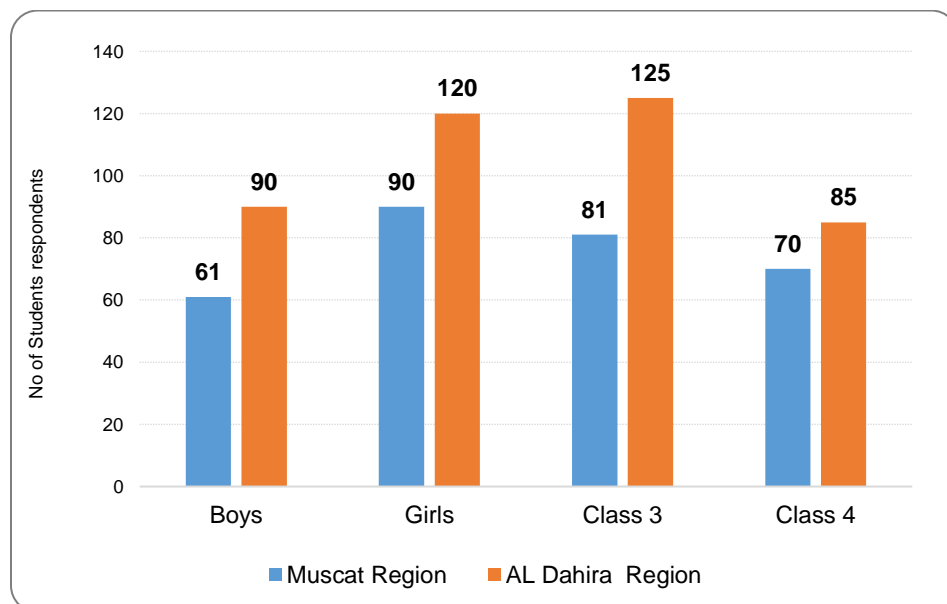


Figure 4.2: No of Students Respondents by Year Group, Gender in Both Regions

In the case of one-to-one interviews, as reported in Chapter 3, students from the Muscat region were only girls, because most of the boys refused to participate according to their teachers. Eight students from AL Dahira region participated but only 5 from the Muscat region took part. Although the interviews were in Arabic it could be that the boys in the Muscat region thought that I would ask some questions in English and they were less positive to participate in the interviews due to their lack of confidence to communicate in English as I argued earlier. Nikula (2005), Mori and Gobel (2006) and Enever (2009) found that girls showed more attitudes that are positive to MFL compared to the boys.

- **Children's Attitudes to Learning English**

The questionnaire data showed that students have developed positive attitudes to learning English. 88.0% of the Muscat students and 90.5% of AL Dahira students found English lessons interesting and fun. There were, however, some differences between classes indicating that grade 3 students reported more positive attitudes than grade 4 students (see Figure 4.3). It was also interesting to find that more girls than boys in both regions reported that 'I find English lessons interesting and fun' (see Figure 4.3). This chimes with other studies that girls are more enthusiastic about foreign language learning in comparison to boys (Harris and O'Leary, 2009).

Interview findings from students also showed that students have developed positive attitudes to learning English. In response to the question 'What is your favourite subject?' all students said English, except two. Confirming these positive views from the range of sources (e.g. the questionnaire and one-to-one interviews), teachers' focus group interviews confirmed that English was a subject enjoyed by most students.

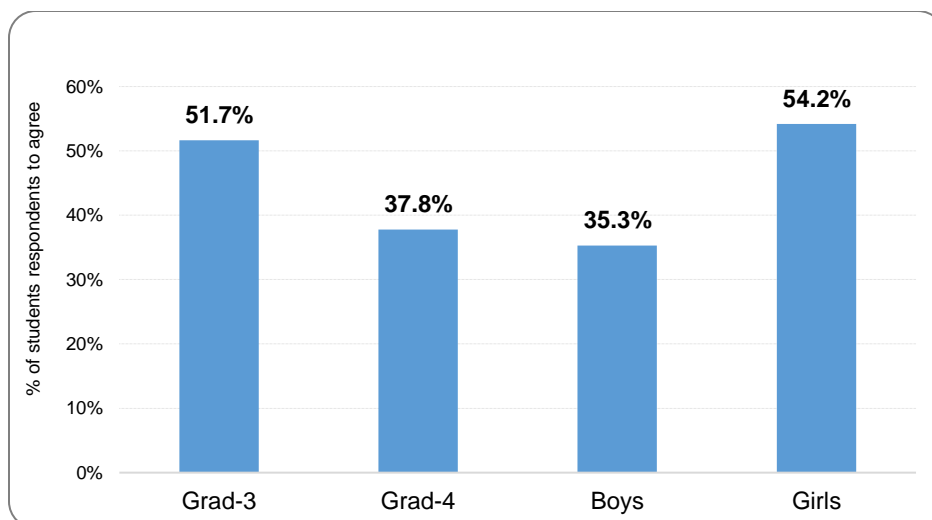


Figure 4.3: Agree Respondents to S1 “Attitudes to Learning English”
Based on Year Group and Gender

▪ Reactions to Classroom Activities

Students were asked to choose ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, and ‘not sure’ with the statement ‘I have lots of activities to do in English lessons’. 74.0% of Muscat students and 68.6% of AL Dahira students agreed with this statement. Although 68.6% of the AL Dahira responses were positive, 14.8% disagreed with this statement and 16.7% declared themselves not sure. The focus group interviews with the teachers indicated that they were not implementing some activities in the textbooks and this could be a reason for students’ mixed views. Students were also asked specifically about their interest in classroom activities (e.g. games and group work activities). Of greatest interest for the students were games with 90.7% of Muscat students and 91.4% of AL Dahira students. It seemed that students’ attitudes were highly positive to the games.

It was also notable that 89.5% of AL Dahira students agreed with the statement ‘Learning through group work in English is fun’ compared to 78.7% of Muscat students (see Table 4.1). In the focus group interviews, Muscat teachers complained about the difficulties in teaching more than four tasks in 40 minutes. It could be that the concerns

about the overloaded curriculum made Muscat teachers less able to implement group work in their classes.

In order to explore more deeply what motivated students in English lessons, in the interviews students were asked to explain why they liked English lessons. The most popular reason was that the lessons have games and stories. This finding seems to mirror the results seen by Nikolov (1999), who in an eight-year study, investigating Hungarian children's foreign language learning motivation found that students established positive attitudes when they enjoyed particular activities and tasks within the learning context. This relates to intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 1994). In other words, the intrinsic motivation (e.g. games and stories) was found to be the strongest factor as regards motivation.

The one-to-one interviews also revealed how students view group work lessons. As one student remarked, *'It contributes to discussion in English with each other'* [Grade 3]. Sharp (2001) also reported that group work is a good example of real communication in MFL. Another student said *'it is an opportunity to learn together'* [Grade-4], whilst a further student explained *'When you work together on a task, you can finish quickly'* [Grade-4]. It is interesting to note that all the girls who participated in the interview argued that the group work lesson was interesting compared to the boys' responses: *'I like to work alone'* [Grade-4], and two boys preferred to work in twos and preferred competitions and challenging activities. Hood and Tobutt (2009) argued that there could be several approaches for fun in the MFL classroom such as active teaching and learning, contacts with speakers of the target language and activities that involve competition and problem-solving. We may argue that activities that involve competition and challenge could have a positive influence on boys learning of an MFL.

- **Different Levels of Confidence in the Receptive and Productive Language Skills**

Students' opinions about their receptive skills (listening and reading) in language learning were generally very positive. Although the evidence suggested that overall a large proportion of pupils in both regions enjoyed listening to stories in English, far more Muscat students (90.0%) than AL Dahira students (75.7%) responded positively to this statement. Interviews with AL Dahira teachers showed that they preferred to focus more on reading stories rather than listening to stories. This could be a reason for AL Dahira students' views about listening to stories.

Further data (Table 4.1) confirmed some uncertain viewpoints about the statement 'I liked listening to songs and rhymes in English'. Although 76.0% of Muscat students and 72.9% of AL Dahira students agreed, 18.0% of Muscat students declared themselves not sure and 18.1% of AL Dahira students disagreed with the statement. It seemed that the students in both regions were less enthusiastic about listening to songs and rhymes compared to listening to stories. With reference again to the authors Hood and Tobutt (2009), it is not entirely clear that the fun emerging is always due to one approach; those students may have possibly been influenced by listening to a variety of native speakers and characters, and by learning about events and places. Teachers' views into attitudes also made clear that stories have a major impact. In the one-to-one interviews, the listening skill also seemed to be the favourite language skill and as some learners indicated that, they liked to listen to dialogues and to conversations.

In summary, it can be said that the positive attitudes to listening skill chimes with the positive attitudes about this skill and textbook activities expressed by teachers in the focus group interviews. The reason for this might be due to topics' relevance e.g. the listening activities focused on stories that were relevant to age group interest. It is also possible that there was better guidance in the teacher's book and teachers had better

pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1987) with regard to listening and this had a positive impact on students.

In relation to the enjoyment of reading, 84.7% of Muscat students and 82.9% of AL Dahirah students said 'I enjoy reading time in English'. However, 83.3% of Muscat students and 75.2% of AL Dahirah students said 'I am getting better at reading this year'. The interviews respondents in both regions explained how they enjoyed reading, particularly because they like reading stories in 'reading time' lesson.

By contrast, it was notable that in the case of the productive skills (speaking and writing), students felt that they performed less well. The students in both regions indicated similar responses about the statement 'I like speaking activities in English'. For example, 75% of Muscat students agreed with this statement, with 17.3% not sure and 74.8% of AL Dahirah students agreed whilst 14.8% were not sure. It was also interesting to find that grade 3 students in both regions tend to agree more with 'I like speaking activities in English' than grade 4 students. This result is in accord with other studies (e.g. Jin et al., 2014) indicating that students who are older (age 9) tend to lose their earlier MFL learning motivation due to challenging activities or other factors. Furthermore, it has been seen that at an early age, children are less embarrassed in front of others when trying the tricky sounds of MFL compared to older learners (Sharp, 2001). This can be a reason for grade 4 students' attitudes to the speaking skill.

In the interviews, although students made less explicit references to the enjoyment of speaking, they expressed an obvious interest in spoken communication when talking about listening as one girl said: '*I like to listen to conversations*' [Grade-3]. Another girl argued that '*I would like to speak English*' [Grade-3].

When I asked them: 'Do you talk to your English teacher in English' all students said 'yes' except two said 'sometimes'. This suggests that the students would like to speak more English, but they may need more encouragement and opportunities to develop this skill. Teachers also talked about the absence of appropriate speaking activities in

the pupils' book. Lack of attention to strategies for encouraging speaking would seem to be a deficit in the curriculum reform.

In relation to writing skill, although 77.3% of Muscat students expressed agreement with the statement 'I think I can write a short sentence on my own', only 66.7% of respondents from AL Dahira students agreed. 12.4% [Al Dahira] students disagreed and 21.0% were not sure. In the interviews when students were asked to describe what they did find difficult in English lessons, three students in grade 4 from AL Dahira region indicated that they sometimes faced difficulties in shared writing because some topics were hard. In addition, one girl argued that '*We write on our own in the shared writing lesson*' [Grade 3]. This was also corroborated by teachers' concerns about this method. Teachers in the three regions argued that it was hard to find enough time to teach shared writing and to provide students with the necessary support and guidance. AL Dahira teachers also complained about the difficulties of teaching writing skill to 30 students, particularly, shared writing method due to classroom size. It seemed that learners of grade 4 were asked to write on their own in shared writing lesson and grade 4 boys were facing particular difficulties in writing. One boy argued that '*Sometimes I have difficulties with shared writing lesson*' [Grade-4].

Students were also asked about their textbooks (e.g. class book and skills book). When interviewed about the importance of the textbooks, their responses suggested that the class book containing songs, games and information benefited the children more than did the class book containing writing activities. The evidence of the present section suggests that those students will tend to be more successful in writing if the activities were directly related to the students' level and interest and if teachers could spend time supporting students with shared writing.

With regard to learning 'vocabulary and spelling', students in both regions indicated broadly similar responses, 80.7% of Muscat students and 81.0% of AL Dahira students said they liked spelling. According to the teachers' book (TB), grade 3 students should learn to spell 3 words each week, and in grade 4, they should learn 5 words each week.

It is possible to say that due to this small list of words to spell once a week, students declared positive responses to spelling. The interviews also showed that the students liked spelling lessons, as one student argued '*I like spelling in English lessons*' [Grade 3].

As for vocabulary, it was apparent that it was considered more of a challenge. The data (Figure 4.4) confirmed more negative viewpoints amongst the two regions. 61.3% of Muscat students and 58.6% of AL Dahira students agreed with the statement 'I know a lot of English vocabulary' with the slightly larger percentage of 32.7% of Muscat students and 25.2% of AL Dahira students 'not sure'. According to TB of grade 3 and 4 students should learn 100 high-frequency words per year, but data from teachers' focus group interviews revealed a different picture. They complained about the fact that the textbook did not contain enough vocabulary for primary learners. It is realistic to argue that if students were provided with 3 to 5 words weekly for spelling, it is difficult for them to develop a wide vocabulary. The English Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008) argued that promoting the use of spelling can support vocabulary development, however, 'having a low vocabulary can trap children in a vicious circle' (p.5).

Again, the interview data shows a pattern consistent with the questionnaire data. For example, when students were asked to describe what they did find difficult in English lessons one student from the Muscat region argued that: '*I have difficulties with the home topic because I cannot understand the words*' [Grade 3]. Another student from AL Dahira region indicated: '*I cannot do some activities in the skills book because I don't know the meaning of the words*' [grade 4]. The home topic was to teach students identifying and naming different rooms and objects in the room. The boy's responses also indicated that lack of vocabulary made him perform poorly in the activity.

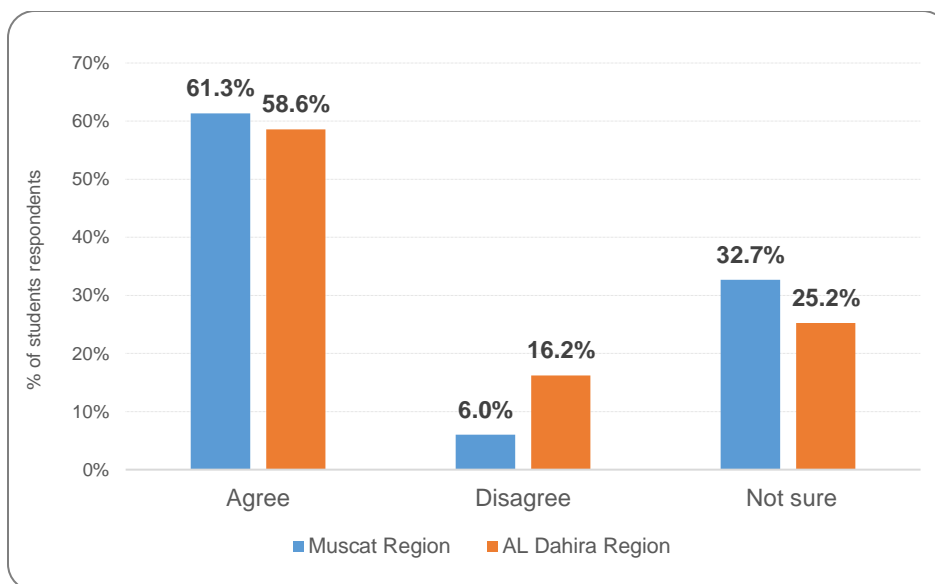


Figure 4.4: Percentages of Students' Respondents to S2 'I know a lot of English Vocabulary' by Both Regions

- **Supportive Teachers with English Activities and Supportive Parents with Homework**

By asking students about their English teachers, I was interested to know if the teacher-student relationship influenced students' positive attitudes and motivation to learning English. The data (Table 4.1) indicated that students believed that teachers in both regions were supporting them. 84.7% of Muscat students and 93.3% of AL Dahira students expressed agreement with the statement 'My teacher helps me when I get stuck in English'. All the students' interviews also showed that students held positive attitudes towards their English teacher. For example, a student from AL Dahira region said: *'I liked the way my teacher demonstrates the lesson and her way in asking questions'* [Grade 4]. Another student from the Muscat region stated: *'Our English lessons are fun and enjoyable because we play with our teacher'* [Grade 4].

'My teacher helped me when I cannot understand a meaning of a word' [Grade 3].

The role of teacher-student relationship in affecting students' achievement in MFL classrooms has received attention from some researchers (see Sharp, 2001). From the above analysis, it seemed that in addition to classroom activities, teachers' contributions also influenced students' positive attitudes to learning English. In the focus group interviews, teachers also felt that teaching English to primary students was exciting, enjoyable, interesting, and fun and were, therefore, enthusiastic. According to motivation in second language learning research, motivation can be garnered at the learning situation level (Dörnyei, 1994), i.e. attitudes and motivation function according to aspects of language learning in the classroom (e.g. the teacher's behaviour).

- **Supportive Parents with Homework**

Finally, students were asked whether they did their English homework alone. There were differences between Muscat students and AL Dahirah students, with 72.7% of Muscat students saying that 'I always do my English homework alone' and only 51.0% of AL Dahirah agreeing with this statement, with the remaining 27.1% unsure and 21.9% disagreed (see Figure 4.5). The uncertain responses from AL Dahirah students may indicate that they were more supported with their homework compared to Muscat students.

In the interviews, the students were also asked if their parents helped them with English homework. The aim of this question was to know if parents were involved in their child's MFL education. The focus group interviews with teachers, in particular from AL Dahirah region suggested that parents do not help or support their children at home. Surprisingly, the data from one-to-one interviews as well as from the questionnaire appeared to contradict this finding. 6 students (three girls and three boys) from AL Dahirah region reported that were supported at home. As one boy explicitly said: '*My mum helps me with the homework*' [Grade 4]. According to the Muscat region students, only two girls claimed that they ask for support with homework at home.

It is important to note that, parents who were most involved with their children's homework were mostly mothers according to the one-to-one interviews with the students. This is not surprising as most of the participating parents in the questionnaire were mothers as will be shown in the final section of this chapter. The reasons for these differences may be explained by the fact that many mothers, from Muscat region, were working and this affected their ability to participate in their child's homework.

Although there was evidence that AL Dahira students asked for support with homework in comparison to Muscat region, there were no differences in students' responses by gender. Both boys and girls were supported at home. Unlike, Jones (2009), I did not find differences across gender in both regions which suggested that girls' parents were more supportive of MFL than were the boys' parents.

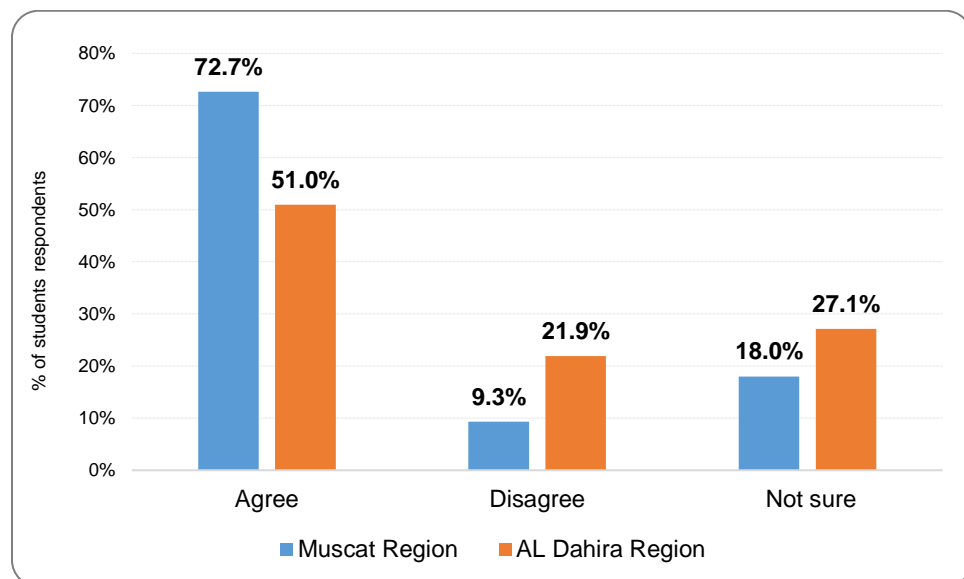


Figure 4.5: Percentages of Respondents to S17 "Doing Homework Alone" by Both Regions

- **Students' One-to-one Interviews about their Views of English Topics and the Purpose of Learning English as an MFL**

To compare students' views about topics with those of teachers, students were asked about their favourite topics in English. It was interesting to find out that, both boys and girls mentioned scientific topics (e.g. plants, environment, life cycle, planets) as their favourite topics. They liked topics that related to living things and habitats. These views contrasted with those of teachers who argued that scientific topics were complex and difficult and they suggested topics such as family, animal, food, daily routine, healthy habits, clothes, and sport. The teachers' responses indicated that they did not wish to teach scientific topics. These negative attitudes to scientific topics could be related to their lack of subject knowledge and pedagogy content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). The students' responses also suggested that the most popular songs and stories were related to animals.

The students also were asked to indicate why they thought English lessons were important, to investigate their motivations. Their answers reflected different types of motivation. Some students said to get to know the people who speak the English language as one student said: *'I would like to travel to European countries and to use English to better understand and get to know the people who speak the English language'* [Grade 3].

Others said that they had to learn English for getting into university, and two boys from grade 3 and 4 argued that it was useful for applying for a job. The following explained students' responses:

'It is important to know English because I want to be a doctor'. [Grade-4].

'I need it for future purposes' [Grade-3].

It is interesting to see that although some students expressed 'integrative motivation' (Gardner, 1985), more students seemed to have 'instrumental motivation' (e.g. to get

to a university and a good job). It is interesting to note that when those students were asked: Do you enjoy English lessons? Tell me why? they expressed intrinsic motivation, but when I asked them: Do you think English lessons are important? Tell me why? their views were more integrative and instrumental. These findings appear to support Yan's (2006) argument that the L2 motivation of young learners is complex due to combinations of integrative and instrumental orientations.

There were two main findings from the above. First, in both questionnaire and the one-to-one interviews, more evidence seemed related to intrinsic motivation. However, the data also suggest that there were other external motivations that promoted children's willingness to learn English that may be influenced by their parents. Following the findings of previous studies of young language learners claiming that parents can influence students' attitudes towards MFL (Jones, 2009), it is possible that the learners in this study were reflecting instrumental motivation due to their parents' influence. Furthermore, we could argue that students referred to instrumental motivation to learn English because their brothers, sisters or relatives influenced them. For example, as argued in section 2.1.3, the number of Omani students going abroad (e.g. to European countries) to study rose to 8,156 in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2014).

In summary, it can be said that the data from the questionnaire and one-to-one interviews imply that games and stories were influencing students' attitudes and intrinsic motivation to English language learning. The results also indicated that students' attitudes and motivations were at the language level (Dörnyei, 1994). More specifically, the language level contains several aspects of L2 learning in relation to culture and community and instrumental and integrative motivation are included in this level.

It also seems that there were external factors that influenced students' motivation (i.e. instrumental). It was also surprising that none of the students made reference to extrinsic motivation in the form of grades although they have short tests and Omani schools and parents value grades. One explanation for this can be identified from

teachers' focus group interviews when they argued that they preferred to use continuous assessment instead of short tests claiming that neither they nor their students understand the purpose of the tests.

It is worth noting that, even within this relatively small number of interviews with students, the issue of difficulties with learning vocabulary, and productive skills (speaking and writing) were experienced by students across the two regions, school year and gender. Parental support with MFL homework also emerged from the questionnaire and one-to-one results, particularly in AL Dahirah region.

4.4.2 Parents' Questionnaire

This section presents the results for part 2 of the questionnaire (Table 4.2), where parents were asked two multiple choice and open-ended questions about their views of the English textbooks. Questionnaire respondents were invited to rate their responses as strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree and strongly disagree. In the presentation of results, the strongly agree and agree responses are grouped together and strongly disagree is not included here as it did not prove significant.

Table 4.2: Parent Respondents

Parents	Muscat Region %			AL Dahirah Region %		
	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
Do you think that the English textbooks provided for your child match his/her needs?	67.5	17.5	15.1	63.4	18.3	18.3
Do you think it is important to inform parents about any change in the English curriculum?	78.6	12.7	8.7	91.1	6.3	3.1

▪ **Parents' Views of the English Curriculum**

In response to the question that asked if the English textbooks provided matched their child's needs, more than half in each region seemed satisfied. 67.5% of Muscat parents and 63.4% of AL Dahirah parents agreed with the statement. The reasons for this were provided in response to the open-ended questions inquiring about reasons for this; supporting comments fell into six broad categories: (1) the recent textbooks are better and provide enough practice for the student, (2) the recent textbooks have interesting tasks and varied topics (3) they were satisfied with their children's achievements, (4) the books matched the students' age and abilities, (5) they have storybooks to read, and (6) there were some grammar, vocabulary and spelling activities.

Responses to the open-ended question nonetheless also indicated some unanticipated responses related to gendered issues reported by mothers. These responses were about their daughters' and sons' performance in English lesson. For example, more mothers (n=10) reported that their daughters performed well in English compared to others (n=4) who felt the same about their sons. These findings support previous research indicating that girls are more positive in learning MFL than boys (Tierney and Gallastegi, 2011).

In response to the question about whether they thought it was important to inform parents about any changes in the English curriculum, the results indicated that parents of the two regions responded differently. A large majority of the AL Dahirah region parents (91.1%) agreed, while 78.6% of Muscat region parents agreed. A much smaller group (just over 8.7% of the Muscat parents and 3.1% of AL Dahirah parents) 'disagreed' with the statement and wrote that it was not their responsibility, and they do not have any experience in the curriculum development, but at least they should know that there will be changes in the curriculum.

Those who thought that they should be informed about change in the English curriculum mentioned the following reasons: (a) parents would be able to help and support their children at home, (b) they are interested in knowing if the textbooks match the students' age and culture, (c) they wished to provide suggestions about any part of a textbook found inappropriate for the needs of their children (d) parents are part of the society, (e) parents are a key partner in the educational process, (f) parents can keep up with the books and find out what is taught to their children. It is important to note here, specifically, the main emphasis and the category that appears more regularly was on supporting and following the children at home.

There are two reasonable explanations for the above reasons. First, parents believed that they should be informed about curriculum changes because they could play an important role in their child's success. It is claimed that parental involvement is crucial for school development and students' success (Unal and Unal, 2014). Second, parents in both regions had positive attitudes towards the English subject, e.g. they valued it and they were willing to support and encourage their children in learning MFL regardless of their gender.

Parents were also asked whether they had any additional comment or suggestions. These suggestions fell into the following categories:

- provide students with a range of teaching resources (e.g. computers and video);
- students should be given a wide variety of speaking activities (e.g. conversations), vocabulary, and grammar;
- the textbook should have topics that reflect the Omani culture;
- curriculum make should consider up-to-date information in the textbooks;
- re-organise the materials of grade one, two and three curricula to be in line with grade 4;
- re-organise the curriculum to cater for students' differing abilities; and interestingly, a number of male parents stated that the teachers could have higher-level training.

In many respects, these responses echoed the beliefs of the English teachers. For example, there were no differences between the teachers' and parents' responses in terms of lack of technology resources, absence of speaking activities and lack of continuity between topics and year group (1-4) curriculum.

It can be said that parents' viewpoints are direct evidence that they play a major part in the development of their children's learning of English curriculum because they were able to identify the positive and negative issues in this curriculum reform. Overall, a high level of enthusiasm for the learning of English as an MFL existed among the parents. Figure 4.6 presents percentages of fathers and mothers who completed the questionnaire. It was not surprising to find that mothers outperform fathers by 30 percentage points (65.1% of mothers compared to 35.0% of fathers) as the one-to-one interviews found that students were mostly supported by their mother in English homework.

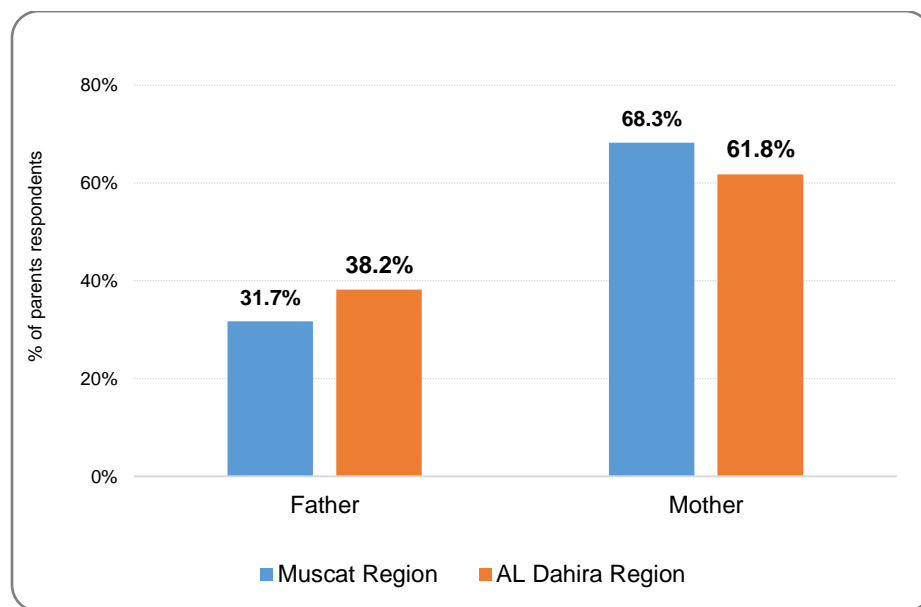


Figure 4.6: Parents (Father and Mother) Questionnaire Respondents

Summary

In this section, the questionnaire and one-to-one interviews, which were used for eliciting data on students' attitudes to learning English as an MFL, highlighted highly positive attitudes and intrinsic motivation. As established by Wu (2003), this study indicates that students who are engaged in an enjoyable learning context are more likely to have positive attitudes to MFL learning. Similarly, Nikolov (2009) investigated Hungarian children's foreign language learning motivation at ages 9-14 and found that the children were highly motivated due to the learning context activities and tasks (intrinsic motivation). The data indicated that the students had a positive response to the learning situation level (Dörnyei, 1994, 1998) due to the support from their teachers and parents.

The data from the one-to-one interviews also indicate that students were motivated integratively and instrumentally. We could argue that Omani students were motivated by different types of motivation in their English learning process due to both their teachers and parents. With regard to parental involvement, the findings of this study showed that parental help with homework played an important influence on students' MFL learning suggesting that parental involvement is significant, especially regarding the understanding of curriculum objectives. The questionnaire data clearly showed a high level of enthusiasm for the English learning among parents of both regions.

Finally, an analysis of classroom activities, e.g. group work, indicated that students in the Muscat region responded less positively than AL Dakhira region and opinions between boys and girls about group work declared that boys were less positive than girls. While inappropriate content and absence of activities were well-established factors that affected grade 3 and 4 curriculum, the findings also suggested that it could have a particularly negative effect on students' MFL development.

CHAPTER 5: Discussion

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed my findings relating to the appropriateness of curriculum content and professional development course content. It also revealed the importance of teachers having opportunities to raise their concerns and suggestions about curriculum reform and being consulted in curriculum development. However, in that chapter, I did not analyse my findings holistically, looking at how the various aspects of curriculum reform and development fitted together and the consequent sum of these different parts. This chapter should be providing an overview of the various aspects of curriculum as well highlighting the importance of the alignment between different types of curricula.

Holistically, or from a meta-analytical perspective, it has become apparent that the main issues and challenges are related to a lack of alignment between the ‘intended’, ‘written’, ‘supported’, ‘tested’ and ‘learned’ curricula. This is the consequence of the current quality of teacher preparation and development, the disconnect between the policymaker(s) and teaching community in curriculum planning, and oversight of theoretical principles in guidance documents for teachers and pupil textbooks.

This fifth discussion chapter draws on the conceptual frameworks of Gvirtz and Beech (2004) and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012), who delineate different aspects or layers of curriculum (intended, written, supported, tested and learned) and how these interact with one another, in order to provide a final analytical discussion of the findings of this study. An analysis of the findings drawing on these frameworks also provides the researcher, in her role as curriculum officer, and others involved in the curriculum development with an understanding of the more fundamental issues in

curriculum design before consideration of intricacies. Within this chapter, the researcher also makes policy recommendations for future curriculum development.

5.1 Answering the Research Questions

In terms of the first research question, which looked at the theoretical principles that need to be taken into account when modifying or designing the English curriculum for primary-aged children, the previous work in this area, see e.g. Driscoll and Frost (1999), Kirsch (2008), Sharpe (2001), Hood and Tobutt (2009) and Jones and Coffey (2013) suggested some clear guidelines. These are: relevant content (i.e. should relate to children's experiences, particularly their social lives and interests); the curriculum should be supported by appropriate language resources (e.g. technology) and should be taught using child-centred approaches (e.g. giving students opportunities to participate more actively in their learning). In addition, there should be adequate time dedicated to language learning; pupils should engage in cultural learning about target language communities in relation to their own to complement the development of linguistic skills. The findings suggested that the principles which received some attention in the grade 3 and 4 primary curriculum were relevant content child-centred approaches. However, cultural learning received little attention, resources were inadequate and although pupils' listening skills seemed to be improving, there were several issues in developing the productive linguistic skills.

The findings of Chapter 4 (see section 4.1) in the investigation of the second research question, looking at key considerations of Omani policymakers in designing the English as an MFL curriculum, revealed that the impact of economic challenges was a key driver in the curriculum reform. There were also educational motives such as introducing more activities related to reading and writing skills (e.g. shared reading, reading time and shared writing).

As far as challenges experienced by teachers are concerned (see the third research question 3.A), teachers continued to raise some concerns over inappropriate content; lack of appropriate balance in the variety of the four linguistic skills and lack of continuity between grades 1-4; lack of technology for classroom teaching; inappropriate activities in the textbook which were not relevant to students' interests; and shortage of time to allow for more support and guidance for students. In fact, teachers' views about what would improve the curriculum seemed to complement the theoretical principles advocated by leading educationalists in the field.

Furthermore, Omani primary school teachers of English experienced difficulties faced by English teachers in other studies e.g. Feng (2006), De Segovia and Hardison (2009) and Garton (2014) related to overloaded content, class size, time, assessment, and lack of consultation in curriculum reform and shortcomings with subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK). Other problems associated with this reform were related to professional development, (e.g. the cascade model delivered by SETs was inadequate in supporting teachers with curriculum implementation); supervision (e.g. supervisors did not allow teachers freedom and flexibility in implementing the curriculum reform) and serious shortcomings with the textbook.

Nevertheless, the evidence collected from teachers in relation to opportunities suggests that teachers were provided with opportunities to send their comments about the reform to the curriculum department and were able to attend some new training courses.

The findings supporting research question (3.B) 'What do the trainers and supervisors think should be considered in the development and delivery of the English curriculum?' suggest there are a number of areas that have been acknowledged in which further development seems needed such as: provide more pre-service teacher training programmes; need for adequate qualifications (e.g. should meet all the standards to receive the award of qualified teacher status); motivate teachers to attend in-service

training programmes; strong need for more appropriate course content according to teacher' needs.

The analysis of the data in relation to the fourth and final research question concerning pupils' and parents' views reveals that the children seem intrinsically motivated by some of the fun activities, such as songs, rhymes, mimes and games. This is noteworthy as it seems to contradict some of the concerns of teachers, who expressed that there was not enough time for all of this. Interestingly, there was some evidence that there is a connection between parents' views about the importance of English and children's motivation. This significant influence of parents on the interest to learn an MFL seems to echo Gardner's (1985) argument that parents can have a positive influence on their child's FL learning.

Overall, the results indicate that there is misalignment between the intended, written, supported, taught and tested curricula and that this is the main reason for difficulties in the successful implementation of the recent grade 3 and 4 English curriculum. Frameworks developed by Gvirtz and Beech (2004) and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) provide helpful conceptual tools in framing my concluding discussion of this study which I will present below.

5.2 Understanding Curriculum and Instruments of Curricular Regulation: Useful Conceptual Frameworks

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) conceptualise curriculum in different parts. These include the intended, written, supported, taught, tested and learned curricula. The authors explain that limiting the curriculum to plans (e.g. intended curriculum) is not enough, because plans can be ignored or changed, which results in lack of similarity between the planned and actualized curriculum. This is the reason for the

need for the written and supported curricula. As explained by Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012), the written curriculum refers to specific objectives, general goals to accomplish and the learning activities. They identify the following characteristics of an effective written curriculum: it is carefully developed, simple to use, explains a suitable synthesis of local practice and is well conceptualised. At the same time, they question an overly prescriptive written curriculum, arguing that teachers should be left to put the 'flesh on the bones'. For example, teachers should receive an outline, but they should make decisions '...to make the written curriculum more likely to be used' (ibid: 9). This argument stresses the need for a written curriculum but also emphasizes the fact that it should be flexible. For example, they explain that the written curriculum can be a hindrance to good practice. This occurs when 'the objectives are ... not related to the stated goals, instructional activities are not directly related to the objectives, the activities do not reflect the best curriculum knowledge about teaching and learning, and the guides are generally cumbersome and difficult to use' (p.12).

The supported curriculum includes resources that support the curriculum (Glatthorn, 2000), including instructional materials, such as textbooks and audio-visual materials provided for use in the classrooms to help teachers implement a written curriculum. Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) note the importance of paying attention to, class-size, time allocations and the quality of the textbook while developing the supported curriculum. In effect, they maintain that a poor written and supported curriculum can affect the successful implementation of the curriculum.

Gvartz and Beech (2004) also refer to different aspects of the curriculum but look at curriculum development from a more procedural perspective. They explain how the process of curricular regulation is not only about curricula policy and the content, but also how it is transferred to teachers and how policymakers check that it is being carried out. They refer to 'instruments of curricula regulation' (ibid: 372) by which they mean an approach to tightening the gap between the intended and the implemented curricula. These are: (1) the policy of the curricula (e.g. who defines and plans the curriculum; (2) curriculum documents and materials; (3) the textbook; (4) teacher

education and certification and (5) supervision system (e.g. checking the curriculum has been carried out) and assessment system (e.g. check whether curriculum goals have been achieved).

Interestingly, from Gvartz's and Beech's (2004) instruments and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead's (2012) types of curricula, we can see the overlap. For example, the first instrument matches the *intended curriculum*, the second instrument matches the *written curriculum*, the third is the *supported curriculum* and the fifth instrument matches the *tested curriculum*. However, Gvartz and Beech (2004) provide an important additional instrument linked with teacher training and education relating to a key finding in this doctoral research. In essence, the findings of this study demonstrate the weak relationship between different aspects of curriculum and elements of curricular regulation.

5.3 A Heightened Understanding of the Key Challenges in the Primary MFL 'English Curriculum'

As Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) argue there is a big difference between the planned and actualized curriculum. In this study, the evidence has definitively established that there are significant gaps between the intended and other types of curricula.

5.3.1 The Intended Curriculum

The 'intended curriculum' as argued by Moercke and Eika (2002) is a set of formal documents which specify objectives to be accomplished and it is designed by curriculum committees. It also covers curriculum standards and frameworks (Billett,

2006), skills, attitude and knowledge to be acquired and developed. The Omani intended curriculum as explained in Chapter 1, according to the Omani English curriculum framework and other official documents, was reformed to achieve economic competitiveness. With the impact of globalisation and the need to address economic challenges, the 'Basic education curriculum' can be viewed as a policy response in the primary phase to address these needs. Looking at the policy guidelines in chapter 1 the intended curriculum 'Basic education curriculum' was also designed with the aims of providing learners with opportunities for experimental learning; shifting away from teacher-centred learning to student-centred learning and learning about information technology, e.g. ICT.

Although it can be understood that the intended curriculum mostly initiated from economic motives, there, therefore, appears to be some focus on pedagogical principles for MFL. However, these aims were not all successfully translated into other aspects of the curriculum which enabled them to become a reality. The findings of Chapter 4 seem to back up the various principles in the literature. Data collected from teachers, supervisors and trainers in this study enabled us to understand that these principles are important factors from the viewpoints of those teaching English as an MFL in Omani primary schools. However, according to the data, these key elements were neglected in the grades 3 and 4 English curriculum reform.

We also discovered from policymakers that the intended curriculum was constructed through top-down curriculum planning. In other words, the impetus for changing the curriculum was the need to respond to some broader state policies and the task of meeting these was then delegated to curriculum officers who were to write educational aims, units and teaching and learning activities. Curriculum officers were not sufficiently trained to develop the curriculum with consideration to theoretical principles and their ideas were not properly aligned with the IC curriculum. Additionally, the teachers that worked with the curriculum officials on the recent grade 3 and 4 reforms did not seem to do so with consideration to theoretical principles or research knowledge, rather, they worked with the curriculum officers in light of their classroom

experiences. Furthermore, the supervision and assessment systems were not directly involved in curriculum development.

Drawing on the work of Handler (2010) reviewed in Chapter 2, he advised that curriculum developers required knowledge, to take curricular leadership. Knowledge such as a universal understanding of education, understanding of the relevance of assessment data and instructional design, understanding of education as a social and political enterprise, understanding of instructional practice and the pragmatics of curricular planning to take curricular leadership roles. Although it was valuable and useful to include teachers' experiences, curriculum officers and teachers lacked deep knowledge about theoretical principles, subject knowledge and PCK and that can positively influence the written curriculum.

5.3.2 The Written Curriculum

In the history of the Omani education system, the teachers' book (TB) is the written curriculum. Indeed, the findings reveal that the written curriculum suffered the weaknesses discussed by Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012). The following examples are evidence from the participants identifying faults in the written curriculum.

1. Language Skills

Teachers pointed out a number of problems in relation to opportunities for developing three out of the four language skills. The reading and writing skills in the textbooks in grades 1 and 2 were a serious concern for all of them and there was agreement that the speaking and writing skills in the textbooks were inappropriate in grades 3 and 4. According to the teachers, speaking activities were presented in the textbooks as lists of phrases and chunks that did not enable students to communicate. In terms of the

writing skill, perspectives varied amongst the participants, with some participants complaining about the lack of guidance in the teachers' book and others thinking that a lack of time to teach it meant that students performed less well in this skill. The guidance issue seems to have had a negative impact on teachers' practices. Similarly, Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) argued that absence of guidance in the written curriculum may result in shortcomings in the actualized curriculum.

Students also expressed negative attitudes to both speaking and writing skills. This suggests that the written curriculum was not carefully developed in terms of the writing skill and as a result, it has a negative influence on the 'learned curriculum'. The learned curriculum refers to students e.g. how the child responds to, engages with, and the curriculum that students learn (Glatthorn, Jailall, and Jailall, 2016).

Additionally, teachers blamed the policymakers for not having introduced speaking and writing skills in the early years of primary schooling (e.g. Grades 1 and 2). This suggests that supporting primary children with speaking and writing skills should start at an early stage. This connects with recommendations by Driscoll and Frost (1999) and Jones, and Coffey (2013). The teachers clearly highlighted the importance of continuity in covering reading and writing activities between grades 1-4 to develop students' accuracy. In Chapter 1 Sergon (2011:20) also argued that the Omani curriculum 'lacked a sense of continuity of skill level and that it often entirely misjudged the students' English level'.

Interestingly, the findings indicated that all teachers felt the listening activities were appropriate and teachers' descriptions about teaching this skill showed their satisfaction about the nature of listening activities in the textbook. However, we do not know the reasons for this positive attitude to listening skill. It may be that (1) listening skill was successfully introduced in grades 1 and 2 and appropriate activities were introduced in the grade 3 and 4 curriculum that both teachers and students were able to cope with, (2) listening activities were well structured in the textbook with good

support in the teachers' book and, or, (3) training courses were successful in providing teachers with different teaching strategies for this skill.

I also found that for students, the most popular element of listening to English was listening to stories compared to listening to songs (particularly about animals) and rhymes. I recognised that students associated songs with fun due to funny sounds, actions and rhythm. As reported by Hood and Tobutt (2009), a combination of language, rhythm and physical activities can be fun and interesting. This suggests that the guidance to teachers for this aspect of the curriculum was well developed within the written curriculum, resulting in a positive learning experience and progress of pupils. It seems that this aspect of the written curriculum was underpinned by pedagogical and theoretical principles.

2. Curriculum Overload

Curriculum overload was also another challenge to deal with, especially in relation to differentiation and class size. Teachers raised the point for the need for additional time or to reduce the curriculum content to allow for more focus and attention to individuals. The focus group interviews indicated that teachers skipped many fun activities in order to complete the textbook.

Interestingly, however, we found contrasting perspectives of students and teachers with regard to 'fun' activities. For example, the students explained that they liked English lessons due to the exciting activities which did not happen within other primary subjects. Perhaps their enjoyment would further increase if the curriculum were less overloaded and prescriptive and more flexible to ensure that the fun activities are introduced and taught by the teachers. Several previous studies have reported on learners' positive attitudes and motivation in learning an MFL (Wu, 2003; Nikolov, 2009; Hood and Tobutt, 2009; Maynard, 2012) in which learners associate it with games, stories and songs. These elements are important for learning a language and

teachers need to pay careful attention to incorporating them in their teaching, or Omani students may lose the intrinsic motivation to learn English.

Group work activity was also another factor for students' positive attitudes towards learning English; however, there were gender differences. Although the questionnaire responses confirmed many positive responses to the group work activity, the one-to-one interviews showed that the girls were more enthusiastic compared to the boys. Some teachers in this study confirmed that the nature of the boys' attitudes towards group work activities was negative and according to them this was related to boring content. The interviews in this study with the boys suggested that they prefer pair work as it involves more thinking and challenging activities.

Another gender difference was that teachers argued boys were not interested in participating in feminised topics such as topics about cooking and cleaning and topics that lacked movements. Hood and Tobutt (2009) noted how fun can emerge from different approaches e.g. not only from activities that use the language but also 'from games that involve problem-solving, collaboration and competition' (p.20). They suggested that fun approaches if suitably related to students' 'maturity level' (ibid), can help them learn and the fun can emerge. We can argue that the introduction of activities in the written curriculum should take into consideration including a variety of activities that stimulate both genders' motivation.

The one-to-one interviews with students and teachers suggested that the low level of students' performance in some activities such as shared writing topics made students feel anxious. It is worth arguing, it is highly unlikely that the child-centred approach can possibly work if it is based on difficult and irrelevant activities. The child-centred approach should be based on materials, which are relevant to children and also related to the pupils' immediate personal experiences (Sharpe, 2001).

It could, therefore, be argued when looking at the actual content that, apart from listening, there seems to be an absence of attention to pedagogical considerations and this caused disconnect between the intended and written curricula.

3. Vocabulary and Grammar Rules

Another point related to the writing and speaking skills was teachers' and supervisors' concerns about the teaching and learning of vocabulary and grammar. The findings suggest that students have limited vocabulary, find it difficult to apply learnt vocabulary and have limited knowledge of grammar rules. Although the English curriculum framework aimed to expose students to a wide range of vocabulary (e.g. 100 high-frequency words per year) and grammar rules, this did not seem to be happening in practice. The issue with vocabulary in this curriculum, as teachers argued, was that it was presented as a list of words in isolation rather than developing familiarity with its use in appropriate contexts.

The findings suggest, therefore, that students were not familiar with how to use the words in a context. Hood and Tobutt (2009) argue that learning a list of words fails to provide opportunities for students to use the language effectively. If students are taught to use the language in an authentic manner, and gradually taught to write or say short sentences, it is more likely that they will improve their speaking and writing skills. A key message of Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) is that the activities in the written curriculum frequently do not reflect the best knowledge about learning.

It could also be argued that there is dissonance between the intended curriculum and instructional activities in the written curriculum which suggests a lack of fit between both curricula. This issue mirrors Glutton, Boschee and Whitehead's (2012) argument that the fault in the written curriculum can be where instructional activities are not directly related to the objectives. The findings also pointed to teachers' lack of pedagogical strategies to teach vocabulary and grammar rules. This suggests that

training and professional development programmes need to be in place to support teachers in this area.

In terms of grammar rules, for example, the feedback from among all teachers in the three regions was that the grammar rules are so difficult and due to the absence of appropriate grammar activities in the textbook, the students found the learning of grammar rules to be more difficult. As with Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012), one of the problems associated with the written curriculum is that activities do not reflect the best curriculum knowledge about teaching and learning. Some teachers also complained about their lack of their experience in using different techniques to introduce grammar rules. According to Byrd (1998) providing the students with concrete techniques to move away from the abstract discussion about the meanings of forms to a more dynamic, actual, and appropriate practice of the form, which in early foreign language learning the author claims to be the importance of the teacher's role. This suggests it is important that MFL teachers have the specialised knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy to provide the children with the needed explanation of grammatical rules.

4. The Cultural Dimension in the English Curriculum has been Overlooked

Unexpectedly, in terms of introducing cultural learning, it was surprising that most teachers in the three regions talked about Omani culture without referring to Anglophone (target language) cultures. The reason for this could be that they themselves lacked cultural insights, or that they had not learnt about pedagogy for teaching and learning about the culture. It was also surprising that policymakers, supervisors or trainers did not point out the importance of culture. Although there was a wide range of in-service courses to support teachers in teaching English as an MFL, there was no attention to learning about the Anglophone culture within these.

Developing cultural awareness or intercultural understanding did not seem to be on the agenda of policymakers. Interestingly, within the curriculum framework, there was one aim related to the importance of culture: 'To value the diversity of the world's peoples, cultures, and ecosystems' (Ministry of Education, 2012:7), but this aim was not translated into any activities within the written curriculum itself.

There is a considerable support in recent literature about the importance of learning about culture in MFL (Pachler, Evans and Lawes, 2007). It is argued that it is advantageous to start from an early age to engage children in different cultures to understand and respect different aspects (Maynard, 2012). As Kirsch (2008) claimed, children have less fixed thoughts on cultural differences, therefore, it is a benefit to children to learn about cultures.

The findings in Chapter 1 suggest that historically Oman developed business relationships with many English and non-English countries and used English as a common language to communicate (Al-Jadidi, 2009). Furthermore, one of the aims in the English framework has been and continues to be, introducing English as an international language and as a means of communication. Moreover, the findings in Chapter 4 suggest that learning English matters more to teachers and parents in terms of linguistic competence rather than learning the culture or sociocultural competence. The benefits to students learning about sociocultural competence could be that it has a positive effect on children's sense of openness to other cultures (Pachler, Evans and Lawes, 2007) as well learning about customs, beliefs and practices that happen across societies (Maynard, 2012).

We may argue that there are factors that influenced teachers' views about introducing MFL culture in Omani curriculum. Lui and Leung (2013) argued that 'education in a particular social environment is influenced in many ways by the culture of such environment and hence differs across countries or regions with different cultural backgrounds' (p.35). In other words, for example, if we compare Oman with other countries in Europe and the USA where intercultural languages education received particular focus and attention due to the diversity of citizens (immigrants and host

communities within the EU) and for business and political purposes (Peiser and Jones, 2014), we realise that Oman did not have this historical experience. The most important condition for success in future curriculum development in this area is to engage all stakeholders (teachers, supervisors, trainers, parents and other interested parties) in dialogue on aspects of the importance of introducing culture in primary textbooks. Furthermore, teachers should be well qualified in this area by providing them with the needed training. Moreover, the number of Omani students going abroad to study rose to 8,156 in 2012 (Ministry of Education, 2014) and in these circumstances it is essential that cultural learning is introduced in the English primary curriculum.

5.3.3 The Supported Curriculum

As far as the supported curriculum is concerned, we saw that large class size and only 40 minutes to teach an English lesson, as well the lack of appropriate activities in the textbooks were factors that concerned the teachers. Most teachers clearly point to the central role of time in providing guidance, support encouragement and input. While most teachers agree that the written curriculum included important topics e.g. reading time and shared writing, there is less confidence about how to find time to teach these due to the overloaded curriculum. Without a doubt, it is possible to state that time and inappropriate activities seem to be key variables in the supported curriculum that presented great challenges.

Research findings from this study also indicated that teachers in all three regions, and a policymaker, believed that English classrooms lacked technological resources. As was discussed by some teachers, technology resources were not only creating interest and motivation in the classroom but also were successful in facilitating differentiation. For MFL learners, technology seems to be highly important as Gerard et al. (1999) argued it gives the learners the opportunity to share, participate and contribute in the

learning process. What is certain from the findings is that the supported curriculum did not pay adequate attention to this.

We also found that in terms of the supported curriculum, students prefer to use the class book compared to the skills book. It is possible that intrinsic motivation not only influences the positive attitudes and motivation but that the class book also influences the positive attitudes. I would argue that one of the problems associated with the skills book is related to unsuitable activities and this potentially has a negative impact on students' performance and attitudes.

5.3.4 The Taught and Learned Curricula

The taught curriculum is whatever is taught by teachers day by day (Glatthorn, Jailall, and Jailall, 2016). The evidence from this study suggests that there is a gap between the supported and taught curricula as teachers who were dissatisfied with this adopted alternative approaches. Teachers complained about the lack of flexibility of the written curriculum (TB), especially when they could not meet the needs of their pupils, which was supposed to be followed by all. The problem related to lack of flexibility of the written and supported curricula was reported by Gvirtz and Beech (2004). They explained that the centralised curriculum model in Argentina was rejected by teachers who discarded official contents and included non-official aspects in their lessons. These practices can have a negative impact on the intended curriculum because the taught curriculum will not focus on aspects of the national curriculum regulations or policies. Furthermore, such a curriculum may undermine teachers as professionals since an overly prescribed curriculum implies a technicist approach, rather than enabling them to make autonomous decisions.

Regardless of the lack of fit with the written curriculum, however, the pupils reported their satisfaction with how their teacher communicates with them, takes a playful

approach, and provides suitable assistance to them (which seems to suggest that they work within the zone of proximal development ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978)). Although Driscoll and Frost (1999) and Sharp (2001), clearly highlight the importance of teacher-student relationship in MFL classrooms, none of the empirical studies dealt with the effect of this relationship in students' positive attitudes of MFL in primary schools. This research suggests that the teacher-student relationship is important, especially where teachers support and encourage students. This dynamic in the learning process can be provided neither by a written nor supported curriculum and should not be underestimated.

Another external factor influencing the learnt curriculum seems to be the positive effects of parental involvement. This study makes a contribution to the field by suggesting a link between children's positive attitudes and parental support in MFL. Interestingly, the findings established parental support across the board with no differences between fathers and mothers or parents from different socio-economic backgrounds and different parts of the country. This suggests Omani citizens supported the idea of early learning of MFLs and would like to see their children communicating in English. In fact, there is a parental alignment of motivations with an intended curriculum which has a possible knock-on effect on the extrinsic motivation of children. These results show parallels with Nagy (2009) who found those 10-11 years-old children in Budapest were learning English as an MFL for a place in university and to find a good job in the future. These attitudes are also possibly shaped by Omani students going abroad to study. However, these findings raise questions about parental support. For example, apart from supporting the students with the homework, do Omani parents support their children in other ways with learning English (e.g. with additional classes or private tuition)?.

To sum up, whilst teachers and parents have had in some respects a positive impact on the taught and learnt curriculum, the written and supported curricula have presented several challenges. Furthermore, a further issue has arisen, namely that not all teachers have the adequate subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, which would help them to act as more autonomous professionals who make judicious

decisions. In this discussion, I understand professional development to be an additional arm of the supported curriculum. In fact, Gvirtz and Beech (2004) identify teacher education and development as a fundamental instrument of curricular regulation.

5.4 Training and Professional Development

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Education supported teachers with a range of in-service training programmes. However, the trainers expressed their dissatisfaction due to the lack of consideration to teachers' needs in these courses. They felt that there was inadequate attention to connections between theory and practice and lack of attention to teachers' beliefs. In addition, however, trainers pointed to gaps in subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) which seemed to be lacking due to their pre-service education.

Pre-service preparation did not seem to equip teachers with adequate subject knowledge evidenced by the fact that most teachers agreed that their English communication was poor. The lack of support through in-service training continued to leave teachers with low levels of target language proficiency and according to the teachers, trainers and supervisors, teachers were unable to provide correct pronunciation for their students and meaningful explanations of vocabulary and grammar rules. The findings in Chapter 4 support those in Chapter 2, namely that teacher subject knowledge and PCK matter very much in the field of primary MFL teaching. The strong relationship between teachers' subject knowledge and their abilities to deliver meaningful clarifications for their learners is highlighted by Richards et al. (2013) and the findings from this study suggest that training courses need significant change. Additionally, it may be necessary to standardise degree qualifications in English taken in different Arab countries to ensure teachers are suitably qualified with an appropriate level of English.

In addition to taking issue with teachers' subject knowledge and PCK, trainers also raised concerns about attendance at training courses, which they felt was necessary for successful curriculum implementation. From the teachers' point of view, however, we understand that they were keen and enthusiastic to attend training programmes but only if the courses were relevant to their classroom practice and training was well-structured. If there were a collaborative process, with school principals, senior English teachers, supervisors and trainers working together to respond to teachers' needs, supporting and motivating them, they may be more likely to attend these courses.

Furthermore, the cascade model of training was found to be problematic. Trainers agreed that given the amount of change and new methodology that teachers were dealing with, the cascade model was inadequate. The problems with the cascade model may have played a part in hindering the accomplishment of the objectives of the intended and written curricula.

In spite of the inadequacies of the model, the trainers were keen to follow teachers' progress in schools after the courses. For trainers, this 'follow up' strategy is an important issue to ensure teachers' understanding of training input. In the literature, the few studies that have discussed the characteristics of 'effective professional development', have found that getting teachers' feedback immediately after a course was ineffective (Guskey, 2003). However, Guskey (ibid) did suggest that investigating the impact of the course on teachers' practice sometime later would be beneficial. This study suggests that future studies should look at the effectiveness of professional development based on following up teachers after training, specifically if the cascade model is required to conduct training. Additionally, with respect to the senior English teacher's role, the findings suggest that the focus should shift from only asking senior English teachers to attend training to allowing other teachers from the same school to also attend training to help the senior English teacher with training. Another different type of professional development could be by visiting other schools to observe different

teachers' practice, especially since many teachers were positive about such exchange visits.

Although, most studies showed that the effect of attending training programmes was related to issues about teaching and learning, according to Handler's (2010) argument, these programmes can also support teachers to take curricular leadership. Teachers' role in curriculum development was reflected in several studies (Wang, 2008; Voogt et al., 2011). One policymaker also agreed that teachers' participation has a number of significant advantages. This would allow them to have a voice, to be more accepting of the changes and less likely to encounter difficulties during curriculum implementation. These findings build on previous studies that found that by involving teachers in planning, they were more likely to assume responsibility for the curriculum (Brain et al., 2006). The findings suggest that there are three advantages if teachers participate in curriculum decisions. One is that they tend to be more satisfied to accept the change. Second, they feel more capable of implementing the written curriculum without facing challenges. The other is that, as a policymaker argued, it reinforces a strong relationship between teachers and all sectors and departments (e.g. training, supervising and assessment departments).

5.5 Supervision and Assessment of Education

The findings in Chapter 4 suggest that the role of supervisors seems to be influencing the taught curriculum. The findings provide some evidence that written curriculum, is not only controlling teachers but also supervisors did not trust or motivate them to make their own decisions about how to introduce the activities. As was noted in the literature review, the research that has taken place in a teacher-supervisor relationship has shown that supervisors control teachers' work and do not offer valuable support (Zepeda and Ponticell, 1998; Gvirtz and Beech, 2004). Allowing teachers to have

freedom and flexibility to implement the curriculum reform according to their students' needs could enhance their professionalism.

It is important to note that no studies on MFL teacher-supervisor relationships that were identified in the context of this work examine the impact of this relationship on teachers' curriculum reform implementation. The strained teacher-supervisor relationships and impact on implementing the curriculum reform identified in this study suggests that future research should take into account this important relationship. Another feature of the teachers' concerns was in terms of assessment, i.e. 'the tested curriculum'.

In essence, the results suggest that teachers do not have pedagogical knowledge about the contribution of assessment to teaching and learning. This problem is most likely to be related to inadequate training, guidance and support. More specifically, the findings indicate that teachers had a lack of knowledge about appropriate use of formative assessment, test design and the recording of data. The findings also mirror those of Butler (2009) and Buyukkarci (2014) who found that teachers of English as a foreign language in primary schools lack knowledge about formative and summative assessments. It should also be noted that, in Butler's (2009) and Buyukkarci's (2014) findings, they found that large class sizes, lack of sufficient time, and workload were issues that controlled teachers' decisions in carrying out formative or summative assessments. The findings of this study could support this since teachers in this study were making their own decisions about how to assess their students which did not focus on learning outcomes. Thus, if these issues influence teachers' willingness to carry out the appropriate assessment, teachers are less likely to focus on assessment that provides themselves, students and parents with accurate information for future planning. This suggests that not only assessment training needs to be put in place but factors such class sizes and time should be carefully considered by those involved in the curriculum planning as argued earlier.

The findings of this study suggest that future research should, therefore, focus on whether it is the lack of pedagogical knowledge that influences MFL teachers'

willingness to carry out the formative and summative assessments, or class sizes, lack of time, curriculum and workload that affect their implementations. Additionally, the findings also suggest that teachers will benefit more if the training department works alongside the assessment department to support teachers in their understanding of the various purposes of different forms of assessment. Referring to the 'supervision and assessment system' as an instrument of curricular regulation, Gvirtz and Beech (2004) stress how different layers of policy need to dovetail with one another to narrow the gap between different types of curricula as well between micro and macro levels.

5.6 How Could Professional Development Establish a Good Fit between Different Types of Curricula?

The findings from this research are in many respects similar to those established by others across the world; policymakers often pay more attention to economic or political issues rather than pedagogy (Nkyabonaki, 2013), and curriculum is initially conceptualized at the macro level taking a 'top-down approach' (El-Okda, 2005; Hu, 2007).

Inspired by Gvirtz and Beech's (2004) 'instruments of curricular regulation' and Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead's (2012) different aspects of curriculum, I have developed 'the balancing act' framework (see Figure 5.1) as a suggested way of accomplishing greater coherence between the macro and micro levels and different types of curricula. The main concepts of different types of curricula from Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012) have been applied to this framework.

The 'Balancing Act' framework has proved to be a useful one in summarising the challenges noted in this study as well providing a contribution to knowledge. Viewing the findings holistically, it seems that the concept of different types of curricula, how

these relate to one another and their collective impact on teachers as well students are unfamiliar to policymakers and curriculum officers. My proposed 'balancing act' framework can be used practically by policymakers to provide them with a *modus operandi*. It can also be used theoretically to understand the processes required for successful curriculum reform, development, implementation and translation. It highlights both theoretically and practically the importance of close and interactive relationships between different aspects of curriculum identified by Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012). It also emphasises how this is only likely to be achieved through appropriate professional development and dialogue between different stakeholders in communities of practice. Indeed, it is professional development and communities of practice that hold everything 'in the balance'. In the following section, I describe the main components of the 'Balancing Act' framework in further detail.

- **The 'Balancing Act' Framework**

As can be seen, the framework seeks to make connections between the macro level and micro levels. The macro level includes the intended, written, tested and supported curricula. The intended curriculum is informed largely by broader state policies, which then informs the construction and resourcing of the 'written curriculum' and 'supported curriculum', largely developed by curriculum officers in the curriculum department. It is important to argue that teachers cannot use the written and supported curricula effectively without professional development. As can be seen in Figure 5.1, the 'tested curriculum' at the macro level should be used for standardisation purposes and needs to relate closely to the intended and written curricula. This study established that in spite of attempts to standardise the tested curriculum, it was not carried out as intended by policymakers since teachers did not seem to think that the short tests fitted with the purpose of the written curriculum. If these links were improved and if the assessments are valid, policymakers at the macro level could make sense of students' progression.

To achieve the goals of the intended curricula, written, supported and tested curricula have to be well linked. However, as far as formative assessment is concerned, i.e. assessment for learning, teachers should have autonomy at the micro level. This information yielded from formative assessment must inform their future teaching in a way that takes students' knowledge and understanding into account as a basis for planning their teaching.

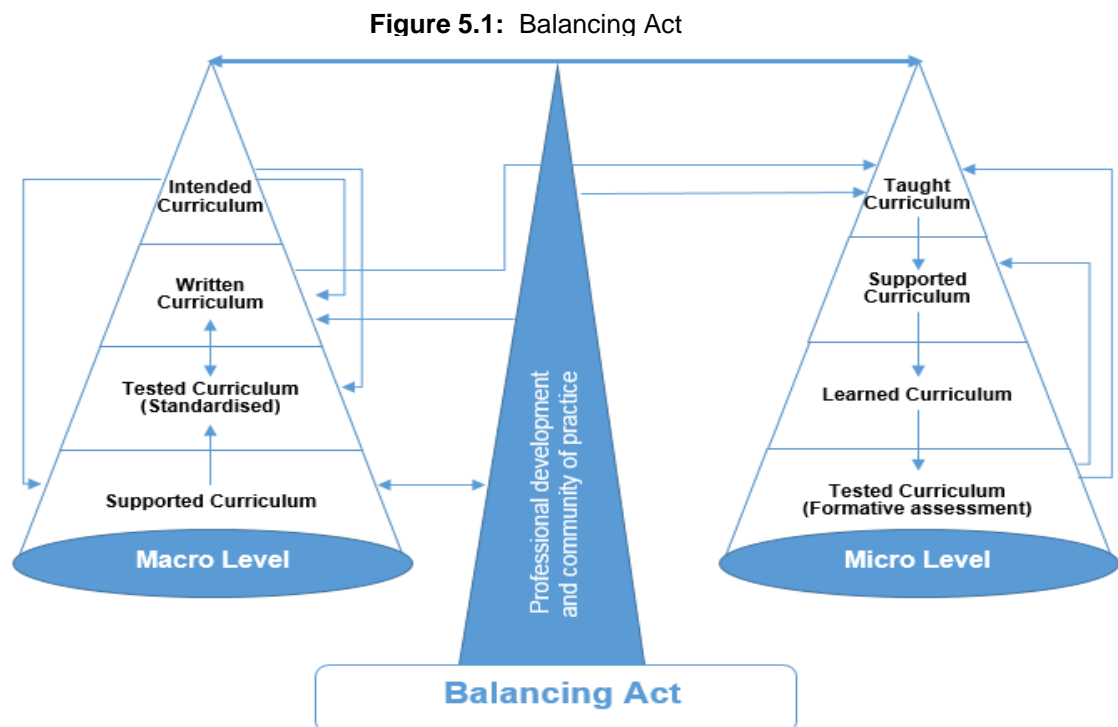
Figure 5.1 also presents the micro level which includes 'taught curriculum', 'learned curriculum' and 'tested curriculum'. It also contains the 'supported curriculum' because this curriculum, like the taught curriculum, involves the learning resources. Then the learned curriculum needs to be tested in order to inform future teaching and learning.

As can be seen in the figure, professional development is in the centre, bridging the macro and micro levels. Professional development should include courses that develop both teachers' subject knowledge and knowledge about teaching and learning. Central to the balancing act is also the notion of 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 2011) where teachers, senior English teachers, supervisors, trainers and other parties (e.g. curriculum and assessment departments, subject experts and educationalists) could meet and discuss the expectations of the 'intended curriculum' to accomplish its goals successfully.

I would like to argue that while the written curriculum is very important in order to guide teachers, it is important also to bear in mind a key message of Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2012), i.e. that teachers should receive outlines, but that they should be the key decision-makers about pedagogy in their classrooms. It is important to realise that there are different factors which are influential on what teachers do: the policy documents (e.g. the written curriculum), their class context as well using their own beliefs (Heckhausen and Kuhl, 1985; Opfer, Pedder, and Lavicza, 2011). Thus, an inflexible written curriculum would be ill informed. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out that however flexible a written curriculum may be, it is highly unlikely that the fit exists

between the written, supported and taught curricula if teachers do not attend helpful professional training programmes.

If there is greater coherence between the intended, written, supported, taught and tested curricula, held together by appropriate training and professional development, the learned curriculum could possibly achieve success in achieving the objectives of the intended curriculum.



To conclude, the 'Balancing Act' is a structure that may provide the stakeholders with a mechanism for sharing goals, aspirations, knowledge and experiences. In addition, it is essential to achieve alignment between different types of curricula.

CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

6.1 My Learning Journey and Implications for my Professional Practice

As outlined in Chapter One (section 1.7), studying for this degree was a dream and I waited for almost eight years for it to happen and finally, this dream has come true. At the outset, I was eager to learn about the most recent knowledge in the field in order to carry out my job as a curriculum officer more effectively. Undertaking this research study has been a valuable learning experience. I have gained some great understanding about conducting research, (e.g. critically reading the published research, data collection using different research instruments and the process of analysis in relation to existing knowledge).

Additionally, from this research study I have learnt that it is highly unlikely that without deep knowledge about theoretical principles, strong subject knowledge in English and pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum officers will be in a position to develop an appropriate written curriculum. Reliance on classroom experience for this responsible task is not enough. Therefore, attending relevant courses should be a key requirement for curriculum officers. These might be at home or abroad, although provision is likely to currently be better abroad.

Furthermore, I learnt that there is a need for expert training for teachers. The current cascade system whereby senior English teachers train teachers in school does not seem effective. In the case of new reforms, it is important for the training to be led by 'experts' who also closely consider teachers' needs. Moreover, in order to provide teachers with systematic information about how best to assess their students, the curriculum department needs to communicate closely with the assessment and supervision departments. This type of discussion is more likely to ensure that there is

greater curriculum coherence and that there is a more logical relationship between the intended and taught curricula.

6.2 Revising the Aims of the Study

As already mentioned in the introduction, the intention at the outset of this study was, firstly, to explore the challenges in the English primary curriculum; secondly, to identify trainers' and supervisors' opinions and suggestions about training and development programmes; thirdly, to explore the drivers for curriculum reform in primary English and fourthly to investigate the theoretical principles that need to be taken into account when modifying or designing the English curriculum for primary-aged children.

The results highlight the appropriateness of the theoretical principles discussed in the western pedagogical literature which seem to have been frequently overlooked in the current curriculum. Interestingly, these principles frequently married with the suggestions and views of teachers with regard to curriculum improvement. The findings also draw attention to the need for much closer relationships between different types of curricula and more appropriate training programmes in order to positively shape teacher practices. I have argued for a close fit between different types of curricula, but that parallel to this, teachers should have more autonomy. It has been revealed that an overly prescriptive written curriculum and 'controlling' supervised curriculum do not necessarily improve teaching and learning.

6.3 Limitations and Further Areas of Research

Whilst the study has yielded some important findings, there are naturally some limitations within. First, students' progress and attainment have not been researched.

In other words, I did not collect data about Omani children's progression in their English MFL development. I believe that their progression should be explored in the future as a factor in determining the most effective pedagogies in learning English.

Second, there were no interviews with my fellow curriculum officers. There is no clear evidence which relates to their experiences, training, and level of confidence in curriculum planning and if they have any concerns. This kind of information would be highly useful with regard to planning courses that address their needs and could be crucial for the success of writing and developing materials. This suggests a direction for further research.

Third, there was one feature of the research design, which may have affected the quality of the findings from the Muscat region in phase 2. I interviewed both teachers and their senior English teacher [SET] and it is possible that some teachers did not express their personal opinions about the topic due to the appearance of their senior English teacher. However, due to a shortage of time, it was difficult to access SETs in any other way. It would have been preferable, however, not to interview teachers in front of those who manage them in order to acquire more trustworthy data.

Finally, I realised that there was an important question that I did not ask: Why did teachers have positive views about teaching the listening skill? What did they feel was different about teaching this skill in comparison to others?

6.4 Recommendations for Future Curriculum Development

The evidence collected from published research and from data collected from various stakeholders led to a number of recommendations, especially for policymakers and current training programmes. In the first instance, policymakers should frame the

intended curriculum according not only in line with their vision for the Omani economy but also taking into consideration teachers' and students' needs. There should be more discussion amongst curriculum officers and policymakers about the objectives of the intended curriculum. Then before reforming any curriculum or writing a textbook, there should be more discussion between curriculum officers, supervisors, trainers, teachers, and senior English teachers about specific issues. For example, what different types of curricula are and the roles they play and why fit should exist between them.

In terms of the written curriculum, our department should pilot any new reform and ask teachers to provide feedback on their experiences (giving feedback can be through the surveys to involve most regions). Further revisions should resonate with the views of teachers. I also believe that the written curriculum structure should allow more flexibility for teachers to be creative.

In terms of training programmes, pre-service training programmes and in-service professional development must be underpinned by theoretical principles and knowledge about how teachers learn. The training needs to be led by both training and assessment departments. If the training department continues with the common strategy that senior English teachers are to cascade the training back to teachers, then trainers as well curriculum officers need to monitor the effectiveness of this in schools.

In many respects, the results reported in this study mirror those of other studies undertaken in other countries suggesting that curriculum reform needs to be accompanied by teacher development and support combined with discussion and negotiation between different stakeholders. The awareness of an effective 'Balancing Act' as outlined in the framework provided in the previous chapter should be, however, of great significance in informing future planning.

I feel confident that my managers in the curriculum department will be able to relate to the findings and that I will be able to raise their awareness of providing curriculum

officers with the needed training since the officers are the main developers of the written and supported curricula. I also hope to encourage managers to allow teachers to play a more meaningful role in constructing the written curriculum.

The findings are highly relevant to future decision-making processes as there has been no prior research conducted in Oman in this area and this study is the first of its kind to address challenges in primary MFL learning in an evidence-based way in this region. Hopefully, the recommendations will be put into practice and lead to the improved learning of English in Omani primary schools and beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix-1: Interview Themes for English Teachers

1. The challenges of teaching English as a second language
2. Pupils' degree of engagement in English lessons
3. Positive changes in Grade 3 or Grade 4 textbooks
4. Characteristics of a 'good' curriculum
5. Curriculum development
6. 'Curriculum Framework'
7. Challenges in curriculum reform
8. Kind of topics suitable for all level of students
9. Training programmes
10. Experience of teaching Mathematics and Science through English
11. Teachers' role in curriculum development

Appendix-2: Interview Schedule for Policymakers

1. Would you please tell me something about your roles and responsibilities?
2. Who has the authority to change the curriculum or to call for curriculum change?
3. On what basis should the curriculum be changed?
4. To what extent have the recent textbooks taken care of the primary learners' and teachers' needs?
5. Can you tell me how should English primary students assessed?
6. How do teachers response to curriculum reform?
7. With regard to curriculum reform: how do you know that the changes are effective?
8. What do you expect the impact of recent reforms to be on primary MFL teaching and learning?
9. What opportunities are there for teachers to contribute to the decision-making process for curriculum change?
10. Do you think it is important to consult teachers in English primary curriculum development? Please explain?
11. Did you use any procedure to inform teachers and parents about recent curriculum reform?
12. What does the curriculum department do to support teachers for the implementation of a new curriculum or curriculum reform?
13. What materials are available for use by teachers to teach primary English curriculum?
14. What special qualities should primary English teachers have?
15. What do you think the role of the curriculum officers should be?
16. Did they have any a professional training for their role?
17. To what extent do you think they fulfill this role?

Appendix-3: Questionnaire



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION Main study (Children)

Title of the project

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Dear Student,

I am a student at Liverpool John Moores University in the UK. I am interested in your views and opinions about learning English. I am also interested in knowing about your favourite topics and activities in your English textbooks.

I would like to ask you to complete the attached questionnaire. It is up to you whether you decide to complete the questionnaire. Please ask me or your English teacher any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Best wishes,

Nasra AL Arawi



Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Children's & Parents' Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect your views about English as a foreign language curriculum in Omani schools. Your views are important in enhancing the development of English Primary Curriculum

Part 1 should be completed by **students**

Part 2 should be completed by **parents**

Please select one of the following choices which best reflects your views on the situations described:

1 agree



2 disagree



3 not sure



If you require help in completing the questionnaire, please e-mail
N.A.AIAbrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. Your views do matter to me

Parents

☐

I have read the information sheet provided and I am happy to participate. I understand that by completing and returning this questionnaire. I am consenting to be part of the research study and for my data to be used as described.

Part 1(Students)

I am



a boy



a girl




I am in year

3

4

The name of my school is

1. Please indicate your response to the following statement by putting a *tick* (✓) in one of the boxes

	agree	disagree	Not sure
			
• I find English lessons interesting and fun	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I know a lot of English vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am learning lots of new things in English lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have lots of activities to do in English lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am making good progress in English lessons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I enjoy reading time in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am getting better at reading this year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I am getting better at shared writing this year	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I think I can write a short sentence on my own	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I like speaking activities in English	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • I like spelling in English | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I like most playing English language games | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I like listening to songs and rhymes in English | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Listening to stories in English are my favourite | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • Learning through group work in English makes me happy | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • My teacher helps me when I get stuck in English | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I always do my English homework alone | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Would you like to be interviewed?



Yes ☐

No ☐

You can change your mind in the future if you wish.

My name is: -----

End of Questionnaire for Students

Part 2 (Parents)

I am the Child's

Father

☐

Mother

☐

1. Do you think that the English textbooks provided for your child match his/her needs?

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Not sure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐

Please give reasons for your answers?

- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----

2. Do you think it is important to inform parents about any change in the English curriculum?

Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Not sure ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐

Please give reasons for your answers?

- -----
- -----
- -----
- -----

3. Please feel free to write down any additional comments or suggestions:

- -----
- -----
- -----

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. You and your child's views are very important

Please return the Questionnaire to the school senior English teacher

Appendix-4: Interview Schedule for One-to-one Interview with Students

1. Which year are you in?
2. What is your favourite subject? Tell me why?
3. Do you enjoy English lessons? Tell me why?
4. What do you love most about English lessons?
5. What is special about English classes?
6. What is your favourite topic in English? Why?
7. What is your favourite story?
8. Do you like the songs? What is your favourite song? Why?
9. What is your favourite skill (listening, speaking, reading or writing)?
10. Do you talk to your English teacher in English?
11. Do you think English lessons are important? Tell me why?
12. Which activities do you enjoy most /least? Tell me why? (pair work, group work, shared writing, or reading time)?
13. Do you feel sometimes that some topics are difficult? Tell me why?
14. Is there anything you do not like in English lessons?
15. You have a Class Book and Skills Book, which book do you like most? Why?
16. Do you like English homework?
17. Do your parents help you in English homework?

Appendix-5: Interview Schedule for Supervisors and Trainers

1. In-service training programmes
2. Challenges in curriculum reform
3. Positive challenges in Grade 3 or Grade 4 textbooks
4. Challenges in recent textbooks
5. Classroom materials
6. Curriculum development

Appendix-6: Letter to Ministry of Education



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Title of the project

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Dear the Director of research department of Ministry of Education,

I am Nasra AL Arawi, a full-time MPhil/PhD student based in the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, John Moores University. I am carrying out a piece of research which aims to investigate the present challenges and problems with the English primary curriculum to develop appropriate curriculum content for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English. The focus of the study is on primary schools, drawing the attention to the three educational regions: Muscat, AL Sharqia South and AL Dahira regions.

I intend to conduct the study in two phases. Phase 1 will involve collecting data from five schools (Bahjat AL Anwar, AL Kawther, Al Waha, Rawdit AL Fkir, AL Nbugh) from the Muscat region by using a questionnaire with students with their parents and semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with 5 teachers. The researcher chose these schools because they provide easy access, as they are located in one area. In case some of the above schools refuse to participate, I intend to request participation from a selection of four others (Al Bayan, Al Manhal, AL Rawaa, Rehab AL Marefaah) but in total, wish to co-opt five schools for my research.

I am planning to write to the head teachers to seek their consent for research to be carried out in their schools. After receiving their consent to participate I will visit the schools and will have an initial meeting in English department meeting with the senior English teachers, the English teachers with at least five years' experience in the

classroom and also will meet some classes of Grade 3 and classes of Grade 4 to explain the purpose of the study, and clarify how I intend to collect the data. Participation will be voluntary and the interview will be conducted at time that is convenient for the teacher and it will take place in their schools. I will ensure that my presence does not disturb the work in the schools in any way.

Phase 2 will involve teachers with at least five years' experience in the classroom and delivering the Basic Education and Integrated Curriculum reforms. The researcher will collect data from the three regions by using one focus group discussion in each region (e.g. Al Mashariq in Muscat, Ibra in AL Sharqia South, AL Majid in AL Dahira) and semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with 20 students from the Muscat and AL Dahira regions. Those students will be the ones who indicate interest to be interviewed on the questionnaire. The researcher will also interview 3 supervisors and 3 trainers. The researcher will write an invitation letter for those participants and the letters will be approached through your department.

Finally, I would like to conduct semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with Director of General Directorate of Curriculum and the Manager of Cycle 1 Program Department. There are no associated risks with the study and all information collected will remain completely confidential and neither the school nor the individual participants will be identified in any reports that are written. This study has received full, unconditional ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores Research Ethics Committee.

There will be no direct benefits to participant from taking part in this study, but the information obtained will enhance and develop the researchers' understanding of an appropriate curriculum content that will help to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English.

Study Time Frames	Data collection strategy	Number to be sampled	Time required
<u>Phase1</u>	<i>Questionnaire (Survey)</i>	<i>250 students with the parents. (50 students from each school)</i>	<i>One week (to return the questionnaire)</i>
December-2013 January-2014	<i>Semi-structured Interviews</i>	<i>5 Teachers(one teacher from each school)</i>	<i>40-60 minutes</i>

<u>Phase 2</u>	<i>Focus group discussion</i>	<i>15 Teachers (5 teachers from each region)</i>	<i>40-60 minutes</i>
April-2014			
May-2014	<i>One-to-one interview</i>	<i>3 Supervisors (one from each region)</i>	<i>40-50 minutes</i>
		<i>3 Trainers (one from each region)</i>	<i>40-50 minutes</i>
		<i>Director of General Directorate of Curriculum</i>	<i>40-50 minutes</i>
		<i>Manager of (Cycle 1) Program Department</i>	<i>40-50 minutes</i>
		<i>250 students with the parents</i>	<i>Two weeks</i>
		<i>20 students</i>	<i>15-minutes</i>

There are no associated risks with the study. This study has received full, unconditional ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores Research Ethics Committee.

There will be no direct benefits to the participant from taking part in this study, but the information obtained will enhance and develop the researchers' understanding of an appropriate curriculum content that will help to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English.

If you would wish to have further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address, which is given below, is the more expedient way of contacting me (though feel free to contact me whichever way is convenient for you).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure. Liverpool John Moores University. I M Marsh campus, Barkhill Road, Aigburth, Liverpool L17 6BD, UK.

Email:

N.A.Abrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix-7: Invitation for Policymakers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY INVITATION FOR POLICYMAKERS

Title of the project

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for your wonderful cooperation with me throughout my career as a curriculum officer in the curriculum department. I am currently a full-time MPhil/PhD student based in the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure at Liverpool John Moores University. I am carrying out a piece of research which intends to enhance and develop my understanding of appropriate curriculum content and thus assist me to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English. This study has received full, unconditional ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores Research Ethics Committee.

Invitation to participate

I am writing to invite you to consider taking part in this study. From your participation, I hope to know about your responsibilities in supporting teachers for the implementation of a curriculum reform and about the changes in the recent textbooks. I am planning to contact you in May 2014 to explain the purpose of the study and clarify how I intend to collect the data. This study will only take place with the complete consent of you and all Information collected will remain completely confidential.

Further Information

If you would wish to have further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address, which is given below, is the more expedient way of

contacting me (though feel free to contact me whichever way is convenient for you). Attached for your information are copies of the consent form and the themes.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely,
Nasra AL Arawi

Room H203, Faculty of Education Community and Leisure,
Liverpool John Moores University,
Holmefield Hse, I.M. Marsh campus
Barkhill Road
L17 6BD

Email: *N.A.Arawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk*

Appendix-8: Participant Information Sheet



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Title of the project

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part in this study. You have two weeks before you decide.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

There have been many challenges in teaching English as a Foreign Language in primary schools in Oman. In this study, the researcher intends to enhance and develop her understanding of appropriate curriculum content and thus assist her to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English.

2. Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any time (that is before, during or after the interview) and without giving a reason.

3. What will happen to me if I take part?

With your permission, the researcher will conduct an interview in your region and will audiotape the discussion, and take some notes. It will take approximately 40-60

minutes of your time. Questions will include your own personal opinion and views about English primary curriculum. It is up to you to decide which questions you want to answer. You may provide brief answers or go into detail as you choose. The time and date will be discussed with you. The interviews will take place at the schools or departments where you work.

4. Are there any risks/benefits involved?

There are no anticipated risks if you decided to participate in this study. There will be no direct benefits to you from taking part in this study, but the information obtained will enhance and develop the researcher's understanding of an appropriate curriculum content that will help to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English.

5. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All the information collected about you during the interview will remain completely confidential. The tape of your interview will be transcribed within three months of being made, and later deleted. The transcript will be marked with a code number or letter, not your name. Recordings and transcripts will be stored in safe place and only those directly involved with the research will have access to them. After the research is completed recordings and transcripts will be destroyed. You will not be identifiable in any reports not during or after the study.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or concerns about participating in this study, you may contact the researcher by using the contact details given below:

Nasra AL Arawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203
Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.
Email: N.A.ALAbrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Dr Gillian Peiser (Academic Supervisor)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University.
Email: g.peiser@ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix-9: Consent Form for Policymakers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM FOR POLICYMAKERS

Title of Project:

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential. ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study one-to-one interview that will last for approximately 50 minutes. ☐
5. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed. ☐
6. I understand that parts of the conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of participant	Date	Signature
Name of Researcher	Date	Signature

Nasra AL Arawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203 Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.

Email: N.A.ALAbrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Note: When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher

Appendix-10: Consent Form for Supervisors and Trainers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM FOR SUPERVISOR AND TRAINERS

Title of Project:

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential. ☐
4. I agree to take part in the above study one-to-one interview that will last for approximately 50 minutes. ☐
5. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed. ☐
6. I understand that parts of the conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Nasra AL Arawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203 Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.

Email: N.A.ALAbrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Note: When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher

Appendix-11: Consent Form for English Teachers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS

Title of Project:

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

7. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
8. I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect my legal rights. ☐
9. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential. ☐
10. I agree to take part in the above study Focus group discussion that will last for approximately 60 minutes. ☐
11. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and I am happy to proceed. ☐
12. I understand that parts of the conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised. ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Nasra AL Arawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203 Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.

Email: N.A.ALAbrawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Note: When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher

Appendix-12: Letter to Head Teachers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY INVITATION FOR SCHOOL HEADTEACHER

Title of the project

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Name of Researcher and School/Faculty

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Dear the head teacher of (X) primary school:

I am Nasra AL Arawi, a full-time MPhil/PhD student based in the Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure at Liverpool John Moores University. I am carrying out a piece of research which intends to enhance and develop my understanding of appropriate curriculum content and thus assist me to work more confidently with authoring materials for present and future Omani primary school teachers and learners of English. The Curriculum Department (Ministry of Education) have given me the approval to approach schools for my research. This study has received full, unconditional ethical approval from Liverpool John Moores Research Ethics Committee.

Invitation to participate

I am writing to invite you to consider taking part in this study. Your school's participation would be extremely helpful for the researcher to obtain an insight into the students' and teacher's perspective about English curriculum textbooks in the Muscat region. I would like to invite a teacher, students from Grade 3 and students from Grade 4 from your school to take part in this research. There are no associated risks with the study.

Research Plan and Methods

I am planning to visit your school in December 2013. I need to have an initial meeting in English department meeting with the senior English teacher, the English teachers and the students to explain the purpose of the study and clarify how I intend to collect the data.

If you are happy for students to complete the questionnaire, I will visit the school and the questionnaire will be distributed to Grade 3 and 4 students by me. The questionnaire should be completed by students together with their parents and should be returned to school within one week of distribution. Completion of the questionnaire will be entirely voluntary. At the end of the questionnaire, there will be the option for students to express an interest in participating in one-to-one semi-structured interviews. I will select two students who express an interest at random for an interview. I will provide these students and their parents with an additional participant information sheet and consent form prior to the interview. In the interview, I will ask students about topics and activities in their English textbooks.

If you are happy for teachers to be interviewed, one-to-one interview will be conducted with one teacher with at least five years' experience in the classroom. Participation will be voluntary and the interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient for the teacher and it will take place in your school. I will ensure that my presence does not disturb the work in the school in any way. This study will only take place with the complete consent of the participant and all Information collected will remain completely confidential and neither the school nor the participants will be identified in any reports that are written.

Study Time Frames	Data collection strategy	Number to be sampled	Time required
<u>Phase 1</u>			
December-2013	➤ Questionnaire (Survey)	➤ 50 students with the parents	➤ One week to return the questionnaire
January-2014	➤ One-to-one interview	➤ One teacher	➤ 40-60 minutes
<u>Phase 2</u>			
April-2014 to May-2014	One-to-one interview	2 students	15 minutes

Further Information

If you would wish to have further information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address, which is given below, is the more expedient way of contacting me (though feel free to contact me whichever way is convenient for you). Attached for your information are copies of the Participant information form, consent form, and a copy of the themes.

I look forward to your consent to grant me the permission to access your school.

Yours sincerely,
Nasra AL Arawi

Room H203, Faculty of Education Community and Leisure,
Liverpool John Moores University,
Holmefield Hse, I.M. Marsh campus
Barkhill Road
L17 6BD
Email:
N.A.Arawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix-13: Consent Form for Head Teachers



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

CONSENT FORM FOR HEADTEACHER

Title of Project:

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Nasra AL Abrawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information provided for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily
2. I understand that participation in the project is voluntary and that the English teacher/students are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and that this will not affect their legal rights
3. I understand that any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.
4. I agree to allow the English teachers to take part in the above study.
5. I understand that the (focus group discussion) will be audio recorded and that the researcher will seek assent from the teachers if they are involved in these.
6. I understand that parts of the conversation may be used verbatim in future publications or presentations but that such quotes will be anonymised.

Name of Head Teacher

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

Nasra AL Abrawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203
Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.

Email: *N.A.ALABrawi@2012.ijmu.ac.uk*

Note: When completed 1 copy for participant and 1 copy for researcher

Appendix-14: Consent Form for Children



LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY ASSENT FORM FOR CHILDREN / OTHER DEPENDENT

Title of Project:

The challenges of designing and delivering an appropriate English as a modern foreign language curriculum for primary school aged children in Oman

Nasra AL Arawi, Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure

Child (or if unable, parent/guardian on their behalf) / young person to circle all they agree with

Have you read (or had read to you) information about this project?	Yes/No
Has somebody else explained this project to you?	Yes/No
Do you understand what this project is about?	Yes/No
Have you asked all the questions you want?	Yes/No
Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?	Yes/No
Do you understand it's OK to stop taking part at any time?	Yes/No
Are you happy to take part?	Yes/No

If any answers are 'no' or you **don't** want to take part, don't sign your name!

If you **do** want to take part, you can write your name below

Your name _____

Date _____

Your parent or guardian must write their name here if they are happy for you to do the project.

Print Name _____

Sign _____

Date _____

The researcher who explained this project to you needs to sign too.

Print Name _____

Sign _____

Date _____

Nasra AL Arawi (Researcher)

Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure, Liverpool John Moores University, H203
Holmefield House, I.M. Marsh Campus, Barkhill Road, L17 6BD.

Email: N.A.ALArawi@2012.ljmu.ac.uk

Appendix-15: Rating Scale for Grades 3-4

MARKS << CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT GRADE THREE SEMESTER _____ Class: _____ Year: _____ Teacher: _____																			
LISTENING	Can understand phrases and sentences. (5)																		
	Can understand spoken texts. (10)																		
	LST: Total (15)																		
SPEAKING	Can produce spoken texts. (10)																		
	Can interact with others. (15)																		
	SPK: Total (25)																		
READING	Can understand sentences. (5)																		
	Can understand short written texts. (10)																		
	RDG: Total (15)																		
WRITING	Can write sentences. (5)																		
	Can produce short written texts. (10)																		
	WRT: Total (15)																		
CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT: Total (70)																			

301