Asian Journal of English Language Teaching, 17, 65–86
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ELT at the College of Law—Muscat, Sultanate of Oman: Analyzing Needs and Understanding Problems

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The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it presents the uses and values of the English language, as perceived by the College of Law students at the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)—the only state-owned university in the Sultanate of Oman. Second, it identifies the problems that have contributed to the College of Law students' lack of the necessary linguistic skills and ability to perform in English language during their period of study at the College. A self-report questionnaire was used with 123 students representing three different levels at the College. The findings show that the students perceive English language to have important purposes. For them, English is an important tool for communication that can help them in their law job search, cultural analysis and understanding, pursuit of higher education, and ability to access/use science and technology. However, the limited time allocated to English language teaching (ELT) in the College study plan, large class sizes, as well as insufficient technological facilities and printed materials have been found to negatively impact achieving the required competence and proficiency to use English for these purposes.

Introduction

When students join the College of Law at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) at the age of 18, the language level of the vast majority, according to the IELTS examination band scale, ranges from *extremely limited users* (handle only general meaning in very familiar situations with frequent breakdowns in communication) to *limited users* (basic competence limited to familiar situations with frequent problems in understanding and expression and failure to use complex language). This is in spite of the

students' spending 9 years learning English at school prior to joining the College. A few others who come from private schools spend a minimum of 12 years learning English. After spending 4–5 years at the College, the vast majority of these students graduate with more or less the same level (i.e., beginners to lower intermediate) in English that they had when they began studies at the College.

Meanwhile, competence in English language (user has a generally effective to operational command of the language) is a prerequisite for Omani graduates applying for jobs related to Law in the private sector in general and a number of organizations in the public sector in particular. All college graduates sit for a test or attend an interview in English prior to being accepted for any white-collar job in the aforementioned places. An extremely small number of these job candidates get accepted, while many others pay hundreds and thousands of US dollars to attend English language improvement courses at their own expense in different private language institutes throughout the Sultanate. Only a very few can afford the relatively high expenses in order to travel to English-speaking countries to enroll in language institutes.

There have been repeated complaints from high-ranking and key officials in various public organizations throughout the Sultanate over the past few years concerning the College of Law graduate students' unsatisfactory level of English and their inappropriateness for filling jobs related to Law. This paper serves as a response to the problem and thus discusses important issues related to the planning and implementation of (1) English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) in general and (2) English for specific purposes (ESP) as in legal English specifically at the College of Law. Clearly, this discussion has relevance and implications for Omani ELT researchers, college professors, teachers, and students. In addition, policy makers, program administrators, and educationists who are familiar with Oman as well as individuals with interests in Asian/international language learning and teaching should also find the discussion in this paper relevant. The discussion can help these individuals gain insights about ELT and ESP (i.e., legal) in the Omani English language education system.

English in Oman

English in Oman is the only official foreign language and, as in many parts of the world, receives political, economic, and legislative support from the

elite as represented in the government, which determines its place on the social hierarchy (Al-Issa, 2006b). It has institutional domains like the mass media, education, and business (Al-Busaidi, 1995) and is central to Oman's continued national development (Al-Issa, 2006b).

Central to the discussion in this paper is what Al-Issa (2002a) found in his case study about ELT in Oman: that people in the Sultanate learn English for communicative purposes and that functional knowledge of English is important for travel, higher education, white-collar jobs, cultural analysis and understanding, and science and technology acquisition/use.

ELT in Oman

Djite (1994) writes that "whenever the government of any nation-state makes a decision concerning the language(s) of its educational system, this decision falls within the realm of language-in-education planning" (p. 66). However, the implementation of English at the level of general education in the Sultanate suffers from major drawbacks. These include textbook-based teaching, poor training of Omani language teachers, large number of expatriate teachers with multiple and conflicting sociocultural and training backgrounds, product teaching at the expense of process teaching, teacher-centered teaching as opposed to learner-centered teaching, heavy teaching loads, poorly designed and produced ELT materials and syllabi, large and mixed-ability classes (e.g., 35–50 students in each classroom), poor resources allocated to ELT, limited time allocated to ELT on the curriculum, a bureaucracy-governed system, a memory-based system (learners are required to memorize the content of their English textbooks), and an examination-oriented system (Al-Issa, 2006a). The last problem powerfully drives motivation and has made learners view the language as another subject to memorize and pass (Al-Seyabi, 1995; Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Issa, 2006a).

While some of these characteristics might be changing gradually (e.g., written materials, resources and time allocated to ELT) with the introduction of the Basic System for Education innovation program, the pace at which change is occurring is very slow. However, problems like large- and mixed-ability classes, heavy teaching loads, as well as a bureaucracy-governed and memory-based system continue to persist.

Al-Issa (2006a) argues that the factors outlined above have contributed inevitably to producing language users who lack the necessary linguistic skills and ability to perform in English and who have a limited interest in

learning the language. Such factors have negatively impacted upon the implementation of the English language policy.

ELT in the College of Law

Curriculum

Each academic year consists of two semesters; the entire duration of undergraduate studies at the College is four years. After these four years, students exit with a First Degree in Law. Each semester is 14 weeks long, with each lecture, or lesson, lasting 50 minutes. At least the last two weeks are lost from each semester as the students stop attending any classes and stay at home to study for their end-of-semester exams.

The marks scored in English affect the total average of credit points scored by students. Those who fail English repeat it during Summer School, which is held at the College. In other words, students cannot graduate unless they pass English.

Since the opening of the College in September 1997, the College Council implemented three different academic plans (See Table 1).

These plans are usually prepared by the respective Heads of Departments. Then, they are discussed in the College Council meeting, and a decision regarding their suitability and implementation is made by the Council members. These plans include the different course titles (e.g., English for Law, Commercial English, etc.) and their descriptions (i.e., the

Table 1. ELT Academic Plans at College of Law

	Semester	Course Title	Contact Hours Per Week	Credit Hours
Plan 1	1	General English	5	3
	2	General English	5	3
	7	English for Law	3	0
	8	Commercial English	3	3
Plan 2	1	General English	3	3
	2	General English	3	3
	3	General English	2	0
	4	English for Law	2	0
Plan 3	1	General English	3	3
	2	General English	3	3

aims and objectives of the course; the subject matter to be taught; the course nature—is it compulsory or optional, theoretical or practical; the length of the course; the proposed semester(s) for teaching the course; the resources allocated to and required for teaching the course; and the "contact" and "credit" hours allocated to teaching the course).

While the "contact" hour refers to the formal time spent on teaching a particular subject in the classroom on a weekly basis (one contact hour is equivalent to 50 teaching minutes), the "credit" hour is related to determining the marks scored and the accumulative average score reached by the student in that subject. In other words, the more credit hours allocated to a particular subject, the more weight that subject carries toward a student's overall accumulative average score on a 4-point scale (4 is the highest and is equivalent to Grade "A" while 1 is the lowest and is equivalent to Grade "D"). For example, if a student scores Grade A in English in one of the semesters, s/he receives 12 points (maximum), which is the result of multiplying the 3 credit hours allocated to English language by Grade A, which is equivalent to 4 points on the credit points system. The highest number of hours allocated to any subject on the College plan is three, while the lowest is zero. When the subject receives zero credit hours, the student is just required to pass the subject, or score 50 out of 100, as his/her score in this subject does not count toward his/her accumulative average score.

In the first plan, English was taught in its "general" form; this meant that students were taught English for general language proficiency in semesters one and two with 5 contact hours and 3 credit hours allocated to each semester. While teaching English stopped in semesters three, four, five, and six in the first plan, there was English for Law in semester seven with 3 contact hours and 0 credit hours and Commercial English in the eighth semester with 3 contact and credit hours. English for Law here is associated with teaching the students different legal terms. In other words, students were expected to memorize a number of legal terms and their meanings in Arabic. The teachers at the College were required to prepare a list of as many legal terms as possible, or whatever they found relevant for their students.

Commercial Law, on the other hand, was taught with an inappropriate textbook that does not take the students' goals, proficiency level, or learning styles into consideration. The book is written by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and contains a list of different Omani commercial law articles in English and their translations in Arabic. The book is targeted

toward companies that need to know Commercial Law in order to operate in Oman.

In the second academic plan, which came as a reaction to some dissatisfaction with the first academic plan in general, English was taught in its general form in semesters one and two, but was reduced to 2 contact hours and given no credit in semester three. There was also English for Law in the third semester with 2 contact hours but no credit hours was given for it. The reason for reducing the number of ELT hours on the curriculum in this plan was due to the increase in the number of hours allocated to teaching other law-related subjects.

In 2005–2006, the College began implementing the third academic plan. This plan came as a reaction to some shortcomings perceived in the second academic plan generally. English is taught in its general form in the first and second semesters only as a part of the first-year curriculum with 3 contact hours per week per semester. It can be noted here that the number of hours allocated to teaching English on the curriculum have been further reduced. This is mainly due to reducing the number of the overall credit hours the students were required to complete to graduate. In other words, the students were required to complete 145 credit hours to graduate with a Bachelor's degree in Law in the first and second plan as compared to 132 hours in the third plan.

By contrast, students at the Language Centre (LC) at SQU have been attending an intensive language improvement program since the opening of the University in 1986, as part of their foundation program, a program in which students only study English for 20 hours per week for one or two semesters prior to embarking on their specialization programs. They study each of the four skills independently in addition to grammar and vocabulary, using a combination of imported and in-house written materials.

English Language Faculty in the College of Law

There are currently two qualified Omani teachers of English at the College. One holds a Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics, while the other one holds a master's degree in TESOL and is in her final stages of completing her Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics. Until recently there was another qualified and experienced Sudanese teacher with a master's degree in TEFL who taught in the College for eight years. Some of the research participants were taught by two or three different teachers during their academic

program at the College, while others were taught by only one teacher. The teaching load of each teacher ranges from 6 to 12 contact hours a week, depending on the number of classes opened in each semester.

Research Questions

In the light of the current situation of English and ELT in the Sultanate and the College of Law, it is worthwhile finding out College of Law students' perceptions regarding English language. To this end, I have conducted an investigation that attempts to provide answers to the following questions:

1. How do the students at the College of Law perceive the uses and values of learning English?
2. What do the students at the College of Law perceive to be the factors that contribute to their poor English language attainment at the College?

Methodology

The sample for this study consisted of 180 students registered in the second, third, and fourth years of their program at the College, as most of these students have attended the first two academic plans described in Table 1 and have already experienced learning English at the College of Law for at least one year. All of the copies of the questionnaire were handed to the Registration Department at the College.

The Registration Department selected the students at random, giving each a copy of the questionnaire to complete and return. The Registration Department chose the participants according to their College identity number. More specifically, every third student on the Department's registration list was given a copy of the questionnaire to complete and return. Only 123 copies of the questionnaire were completed in full and returned to the Registration Department. An information sheet was attached to the questionnaire that explained the aim of the research and its importance for ELT at the College of Law.

A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 13 items was used for data collection (see Appendix A), and the statistics package SPSS 12.0 was used to compute the participants' responses. While the questionnaire was originally prepared in English, it was translated into Arabic prior to distribution to the students.

The 13 items in the questionnaire were largely derived from and inspired by the literature about the uses and values of English and ELT in Oman. To each statement, the participants were asked to indicate their responses: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree.* The 13-item questionnaire covered two attitudinal dimensions. They included:

- Uses and values of English language. This dimension was covered in items 1–7.
- ELT at the College of Law. This dimension was covered in items 8–13.

To improve questionnaire quality, reliability and validity, the questionnaire was piloted on 12 volunteer students from the College of Law. This process subsequently helped with refining some of the questions in the questionnaire and adding and omitting others so as to suit the aims of the study.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are presented in light of the two attitudinal dimensions for the Law students at the College. Each domain is presented, analyzed, and discussed separately. Answers from *Strongly Agree* and *Agree* on the one hand and *Strongly Disagree* and *Disagree* on the other will be combined throughout this section of the paper.

Purposes of English: Uses and Values

This dimension covers the following aspects: English for different daily interactive purposes; English for cultural analysis and understanding; English for pursuing higher education; English for acquiring science and technology; and general and legal English for employment purposes.

In item 1, only 33.3% agreed that learning English helps them for different daily oral and written interactive activities outside the classroom. Such activities include using English in different contexts and may involve the exchange of information on oral-aural basis or through using the Internet for purposes such as e-mailing or chatting, or sending and receiving messages through the mobile phone.

The non-Arab expatriate labor force has largely influenced and contributed to the spread and maintenance of English language in Oman for over three decades (Al-Issa, 2002a). In 2004, the Ministry of National

Economy has reported the number of expatriates in the labor force to be 547,477, with foreign workers coming from such countries as India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Philippines, and others. This labor force can be mostly seen working in the private sector in important fields like medicine, engineering, teaching, construction, and business. Al-Busaidi (1998) thus stresses that English is very important for socializing and integrating with the foreign labor force and also non-Arab tourists in Oman.

Furthermore, the number of non-Arabic speaking tourists in the Sultanate has been growing year by year. These tourists come from different countries around the world (Ministry of National Economy, 2004) and their number reached 254,147 in 2002.

Moreover, times have changed and so have means and dynamics of social communication. Electronic mail today has become the world's fastest and most effective and dynamic means of exchanging of information. Chatting online is also a very popular interactive activity amongst youth today in Oman. Such computer-based technology is bringing the world closer than ever before and is creating opportunities for different members of the international community to interact in English about various topics (Savignon, 2002). Internet users in Oman are growing day by day. This is particularly the case in Muscat where almost every house has a computer with access to the Internet. And Internet Cafes, which are too growing in number every day particularly in Muscat, are widely visited by youngsters. This computer-based interaction, according to Savignon (2002), contributes to developing English language users' overall language competence.

In contrast, 50.4% disagreed that learning English helps them in different daily oral and written interactive activities with different members of the society. The vast majority of the College students come from outside Muscat, the capital, where access to English language use either electronically or on a face-to-face basis is somehow limited, or at least not as common as it is in Muscat.

As far as item 2 is concerned, 72.3% agreed that learning English helps them read different texts from a variety of sources, while 21.1% disagreed. The printed word has always had a powerful impact (Al-Issa, 2002a). Hussein (1999) stresses that knowledge of English has facilitated access to publications in English round the world, which in turn has lead non-native speakers of English to develop "openness" and to acquire "qualities of modernization."

English today is the language of the majority of web sites. Krashen (2003) writes that "as of 2001, 45% of the 500 million users were native English speakers. Nevertheless, over 75% of websites linked to secure servers in 1999 were in English" (p. 1).

However, most, if not all of the texts found on the Internet and in the various newspapers, magazines, and books are classified as "authentic"—texts that are not simplified to suit English language classroom use. Omani students are hardly exposed, if ever, to any kind of authentic texts during their English language education at school (Al-Issa, 2006a). In addition, many of the texts found in the aforementioned sources contain a variable degree of culture. The locally produced textbooks (*Our World through English*) rarely integrate English language with its culture(s). The focus is rather on using English to teach Omani culture (Al-Issa, 2005b). This consequently contributes to reducing the students' familiarity with the different language contexts.

As for item 3, 82.1% agreed that learning English helps them understand the culture of English-speaking countries. Language and culture are inseparable and intimately related (Jiang, 2000; Al-Issa, 2005b). The spread of English and its culture, which did not happen haphazardly (Phillipson, 1992; Dua, 1994; Pennycook, 1994; Crystal, 1997; Zughoul, 2003), and which has been described as natural and beneficial (Pennycook, 1994), placed English in a position of power worldwide (Kachru & Nelson, 1996; Zughoul, 2003). This is clearly the case in Oman, a postcolonial context.

Therefore, the high percentage scored in favor of learning English for cultural analysis and understanding is natural in light of the powerful role played by the media today. The free-to-air TV channels, which broadcast English-medium programs mainly from the USA and a few from the UK and Australia, are growing in number everyday. Such programs can be watched on at least 10 free-to-air channels, let alone the encrypted ones. Kaito (1996) argues that American movies and music, which have a strong popular cultural component embodied within them, carry the English language throughout the world. Such programs have their audience throughout the Sultanate. Al-Issa (2005b) states that many young Omanis have developed a love for Western culture, pop music, and movies. This is particularly the case with the today's generation who goes to cinemas, rents English movies on digital versatile disks, downloads movies off the Internet, and videotapes and purchases songs on compact disks and audiocassettes. There are shops which rent and sell these things throughout

Oman and particularly in Muscat. There are also three cinemas in Muscat that exclusively show the latest American movies.

In item 4, a total of 87.8% agreed that they would like to read different texts about Law in English from different sources. This item reflects the importance of learning English as a tool for the acquisition of science and technology. Capital, information technology, and knowledge have given English power over its rivals, helped it to become the first international language in the world, and made it within easy reach of many users. Spolsky (1998) acknowledges that people all over the world have been encouraged to learn English, as it is associated with modern technology, economic progress, and internationalization. Krashen (2003) writes that "in 1997, 95% of the articles cited in the Science Citation Index were written in English" (p. 1). He attributes this substantial increase to "the contributions of scholars from non-English speaking countries" (p. 1).

English has penetrated into different parts of the world rapidly and through means of scientific research and discoveries, exchange of information and technology, and technological inventions (Grabe, 1988; Pennycook, 1994; Crystal, 1997; Hasman, 2000; Zughoul, 2003) like the Internet, that has become accessible to millions of people round the world in general and thousands of people in Oman in particular. It is a necessity rather than a luxury in Oman. Crystal (1997) reports that 80% of the information available on the Internet is in English.

In item 5, 24.3% were not sure about pursuing their higher education in English, while 72.3% agreed they will pursue their higher education in English. This is despite the fact that the College has been administering an Arabic-medium master's degree program in Law for almost three years. This item is closely linked to the previous item about the importance of English for science and technology acquisition. English is "functionally attractive" and provides "access to higher education" (de Klerk, 1999, p. 316). Crystal (1997) thus assumes that the dominant view today is that a person is more likely to be in touch with the latest thinking and research in a subject by learning English. Moreover, Krashen (2003) claims that competence in English today largely guarantees success in international science and scholarship.

The Omani government encourages nominated postgraduate students to pursue their university studies in countries like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA. According to the figures obtained from the database of the Ministry of Higher Education (2005), there are 568 postgraduate Omani students studying in English-speaking countries.

A substantial amount of the academic literature today is published in English (English 28% as opposed to Chinese 13.3%, German 11.8%, French 7.7% and Spanish 6.7%), notes Graddol (2001). This makes knowledge of English as an international language essential for accessing and acquiring knowledge, information, and data.

The Ministry of Higher Education strongly encourages students who read for their postgraduate degrees to go to English-speaking countries, as research facilities are more advanced. There are 47 students reading for their master's degrees and doctorates in Law in English-speaking countries like Australia, Britain, and New Zealand. These students have been mainly financed and sponsored by various ministries like the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Higher Education, and the Ministry of Manpower—responsible for the expatriate laborers recruited to work in Oman—and by academic institutions like SQU. There are also other students who are privately- or self-financed. I mentioned earlier that white-collar jobs are competitive and that these students have a distinct edge over their College of Law counterparts when it comes to demonstrating competence in English language.

Furthermore, the tuition fees for the language improvement courses attended in English-speaking countries cost between US $5,000 and US $10,000 per calendar year per student. There are also additional fees paid by the government to the students on scholarship to such countries. These include living expenses, airfare tickets, books, and clothes, which take the total cost to approximately US $25,000.

In item 6, an overwhelming majority of 92.7% agreed that competence in English helps them find a white-collar job in the private/public sector. Kachru (1986) suggests that English has "material parameter" where it is considered as a "tool for mobility, economic gains and social status" (p. 130) and is "a useful instrument towards … improving employment prospects" (Littlewood, 1984, p. 57). A large number of public[1] and private[2] establishments only accept applicants with competence in English.

More than half of the graduates of the last cohort (2005–06) have failed to find jobs in the public sector organizations, as jobs in the private sector are few and applicants are being accepted on the basis of their performance in the job interview. However, these applicants cannot apply for jobs in the private sector establishments due to a lack of the necessary skills and ability to perform in English.

In item 7, a total of 87% agreed that learning legal English is important for finding a job. The College students will come across documents, texts,

and references in English during their careers. Functional knowledge of English is not only power in Oman, but it is also a prerequisite for finding a white-collar job (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Balushi, 2001; Al-Issa, 2002a) and for "Omanization"—a process which aims at replacing the expatriate skilled force with a national one—especially in the private sector, which is playing a vital and dynamic role in the country's economic development, as stressed by His Majesty the Sultan and the government. Many companies prefer to recruit Omani legal researchers and lawyers, as it is a part of fulfilling Omanization. The government has been stressing the vital role of the private sector in creating jobs for the Omani graduates and youth to help speed up the Omanization process. Jobs in the various private sector firms are usually well paid.

ELT at the College: Areas of Concern

This domain covers the following aspects: the teaching techniques used by the English teachers, materials used by the teachers, time allocated to ELT on the College plan, classroom sizes, technological resources, and facilities available for learning English at the College and printed materials found at the College library.

In item 8, 78.1% of the participants felt that the teaching techniques used by the English teachers at the College are effective, while 17% disagreed. Teachers at the College are free to apply any techniques they find suitable for facilitating their students' learning. This situation is contrary to what is found in schools throughout Oman, where teachers are required to follow the teacher's guide—a book that prescribes the teaching methodologies and techniques for the teachers for each lesson—almost religiously, and where there is hardly any space given to teachers to bring any of their own creative and innovative initiatives to the classroom (Al-Issa, 2005a).

In item 9, which is closely related to the previous item, 23.5% disagreed that the materials used by the English teachers at the College are suitable, while 72.3% agreed. Teachers at the College are free to use any materials they find suitable for their students' needs, interests, and levels. Examples here are textbooks and photocopiable materials, which are available in limited numbers in what is known as the ELT Resource Corner.

Teachers are also free to supplement the syllabus when and where possible. This is contrary to the rigid situation in schools where teachers

are expected to largely adhere to the prescribed syllabus (Al-Issa, 2005a). There are, for instance, no watchdogs, like inspectors, involved here to follow up the implementation of the syllabus and the academic plan, as is the case in the schools supervised by the Ministry of Education, which gives the College teachers epistemic power over the syllabus and considerable flexibility and liberty to make the necessary technical decisions.

In item 10, while 21.9% agreed that the hours allocated to ELT on the College plan are sufficient, 78.1% disagreed. Lightbown (2000) argues that "the most important reason for incomplete acquisition in foreign language classroom settings is probably the lack of time available for contact with the language" (p. 449).

The vast majority of these students have already come from public schools where they have received less than 700 hours of formal English language instruction throughout the nine years they had spent at school. Research, on the other hand, has proved that students need a minimum of 4000 instruction hours to reach proficiency in a second language. This is the case in the Province of Ontario in Canada, where French is a second language (Nunan, Tyacke, & Walton, 1987).

Managing ELT time in this way thus has contributed to belittling the value of the world's international language in the eyes of the Omani students in general. It further made them view it as another subject in the school curriculum that can be learned and forgotten later, or just another mountain to climb (Al-Issa, 2006a).

In item 11, while 19.5% agreed that the number of students in the English class is suitable, 75.6% disagreed. Large and mixed-ability classes impede second language interactive activity design (Al-Toubi, 1998). There were 141 students enrolled during 2006–07 as compared to 120 students when the College was first opened in 1997. However, these 141 first-year students have been divided into three large groups, with each group consisting of 35–45 students on average. In fact, this has always been the case since the opening of the College.

The majority of the subjects in the College are thus taught with large numbers of students in the classrooms. These classrooms can accommodate up to 70 students at one time. The dominant style of teaching at the College is the somehow "traditional" lecturing or chalk-and-talk style. The professor gives a lecture about one of the topics in the curriculum, and the students are engaged in taking down notes. Students are then expected to memorize these notes and the textbook content for the

mid-semester and end-of-semester exam purposes. Teaching Law at the College, in other words, is strictly theory-based and confined to the classrooms.

In item 12, 49.6% disagreed that the technological resources and facilities available for ELT at the College are sufficient. The College is equipped with some state-of-the-art technology like a multi-media lab with a seating capacity exceeding 90 students at one time. While the computers in the lab are connected to the Internet, none of them includes self-study English language improvement programs or even any ELT software for the teachers to use with their students. This is despite the emphasis laid on the important role of computers in the literature in enhancing the students' second language capacity (Al-Kahtani, 1999; Tsai, 2003). Other technological equipment like the OHP, for instance, is kept at the audio-visual department for almost all the time and can only be made available on official request.

On the other hand, 34.1% agreed that the technological resources and facilities available for ELT at the College are sufficient, while 20.3% were not sure in item 12. Many of the schools in the interior (and remote) regions of the Sultanate, where the College students mainly come from, lack technological resources and facilities. Hence, education in general and ELT in specific in these schools are confined to simple and limited resources like the blackboard, a tape recorder for teaching listening in English classes, and the textbook—the center of the entire teaching-learning process—with the teacher considered the ultimate and dominant figure of epistemic authority. On the other hand, a few other schools in Muscat and other regions throughout the Sultanate, while recently equipped with computers and access to the Internet, lack other technological resources like self-study English language improvement programs and software, for instance, and other technologically modern and sophisticated equipment. This subsequently reduces the students' familiarity with such items.

In item 13, 71.5% disagreed that the printed materials in English found in the College library are sufficient or provide good exposure to the language, while 19.5% were not sure. The College library contains an extremely limited number of English graded readers—stories that vary in their language level—and English reference books such as dictionaries. Moreover, there are no English newspapers or magazines found in the library. School libraries throughout the Sultanate experience almost an identical situation to this.

Each year thousands of US dollars are thus spent on purchasing Arabic-medium books and reference books about Law to enrich the library. However, no budget has ever been allocated to purchasing any English books or subscribing to local or imported English-medium newspapers or magazines. This is attributed mainly to the fact that Arabic is the dominant language in the College and the medium of instruction and that English is just another subject in the College curriculum. Even the academic, technical, and administrative staff at the College, who are a mixture of Omanis and Arabs, hardly possess the necessary skills and ability to perform in English.

Krashen (2003) argues that people acquire language when they receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation. Krashen emphasizes the importance of recreational reading and describes it as "an extremely powerful form of comprehensible input" (p. 3). Krashen considers graded readers and easy authentic reading like magazines, for instance, as two important stages of free voluntary reading. Krashen sees that one of the goals of recreational reading is to help students "establish a pleasure reading habit in the second language" (p. 6). Krashen further argues that "many studies confirm that those who read more write better" (p. 4) and that "it is reading, not instruction, that helps us develop a good writing style" (p. 4).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined the perceptions of students regarding ELT at the College of Law—Muscat. The study focused on 123 students representing three different academic levels. A self-report questionnaire was employed, which included questions on the uses and values of English and English within education at the College.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a disparity between the way the government and the study participants theorize the uses and values of English language and the way English is implemented (within education) at the College. The College Council, the body responsible for planning the College curriculum and making all the academic decisions in the College, has clearly failed to see this, despite numerous student complaints to different key officials and SQU administrators about the status of ELT at the College. The College Council dealt with the world's international language as another subject on its academic plan. This is a problem the Omani public education system has been experiencing for over three decades.

Serious attempts were made in 2002 via a written proposal which suggested and discussed various means of developing and upgrading the status of ELT at the College (Al-Issa, 2002b). Two important things the proposal suggested were providing more and better resources for and giving more time to ELT in the College curriculum. These are two important findings of the present study which have a powerful influence on second language proficiency.

The Sultanate of Oman needs English as a dynamic and powerful tool for modernization and nationalization. The establishment of the College cost approximately US $20 million with student expenditure reaching approximately US $10,000 per capita from the day the student joins the College until s/he graduates. A deliberate choice of English has thus been made by the government to reach satisfactory levels of national development. However, the current implementation of ELT at the College clearly blocks effective and successful second language policy implementation and impedes Omanization.

The findings of this study will be put before the decision makers in SQU. It becomes important that they take into consideration the way the instrumentally motivated College students perceive the uses and values of this international language and its implementation within the College. It is imperative to bridge the gap between these two aspects in order to implement the most effective solutions.

SQU is thus equipped with state-of-the-art technological facilities and a library with Arabic- and English-medium books, periodicals, reference books, magazines, newspapers, etc. In addition, students in the English language classrooms in LC are streamed according to their levels and abilities in English, with a maximum of 22 students in each classroom. When students majoring in science-based specializations at SQU join their respective colleges, they not only study all subjects in English, but they also attend content-specific ESP courses there. These ESP courses are one to two semesters long and integrate language improvement and academic English. This may sound helpful to bring up the College of Law students' level in English in the near future.

However, according to some LC officials, the vast majority of students exit the LC intensive program on 4–4.5 on the IELTS, which according to *The IELTS Handbook* (1998) means that such students are "limited users" who possess "basic competence," which is "limited to familiar situations." Furthermore, such students "have frequent problems in understanding and expression" and are "not able to use complex language." This

level of English still does not help the College of Law students use the language interactively, understand various legal or general English texts, pursue their higher education in an English-medium program or country, and find an appropriate job. This is particularly the case in the private sector, where the challenges are immense.

It is important, therefore, for the students of the College of Law to attend the LC intensive language program at the foundation level, as it is the only option at SQU thus far, and continue taking English classes until graduation. One of the findings of this research has been the limited time allocated to ELT at the College and the negative impact this can have on the students' development of competence in English.

In addition, while the College students are not expected to learn Law in English, as Arabic is the medium of instruction for humanities majors at SQU, ESP can be introduced in the final year (two semesters). In other words, it can be introduced after the students have reached a level in general English that enables them to cope with and focus better on technical and content-specific English. Smoak (2003) stresses that "ESP is not teaching lists of technical vocabulary" (p. 27). Gatehouse (2001) writes that "ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students" (p. 27). Language learning and acquisition, general or specific, require good exposure to and practice of the target language; and continuity in receiving formal instruction in English in as much a dynamic, innovative, and creative way as possible can largely guarantee such chances for the students.

Notes

1. SQU, Ministry of National Economy, Ministry of Defense—the Navy and Air Force, Ministry of Oil and Gas, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Health are examples of public establishments.
2. Private establishments include oil production sector companies such as Petroleum Development of Oman and others, electricity sector companies, energy production and water desalination sector companies, telecommunication sector companies, insurance sector companies, investment sector companies, industry sector companies, banks, private universities, and colleges, and the Capital Market Authority.

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Appendix A

No.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Learning English helps me use the language for different daily oral and written interactive activities outside the classroom (e.g., speaking with different members of the society, chatting, e-mailing and sending and receiving SMS).					
2	Learning English helps me read different texts from a variety of sources (e.g., Internet, magazines, newspapers, books, etc.).					
3	Learning English helps me understand the culture of the English-speaking countries.					
4	Learning English helps me read different texts about Law from different sources like, for example, the Internet, books and journals.					
5	I wish to pursue my higher education in English.					
6	Competence in English can help me find a white-collar job in the field of Law.					
7	Learning legal English can help me with my future job.					
8	The teaching techniques used by the English teachers are effective.					
9	The materials used by the teachers for teaching English are suitable.					
10	The hours allocated to teaching English on the College plan are sufficient.					
11	The number of students in the classrooms is suitable.					
12	The technological resources & facilities available for learning English at the College (e.g., computer labs, access to the Internet, English language learning software, and OHP) are sufficient and helpful.					
13	The printed materials in English (e.g., reference books, general purpose reading books, English newspapers and magazines, and graded readers) found in the College library are satisfactory and provide me with good exposure to English.					