

Career Guidance in the Omani ELT Textbooks in Light of Oman Vision 2040: Comparison Between Grade Six and Grade Nine

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the extent to which Omani English language teaching (ELT) textbooks include career guidance dimensions. There are almost four career guidance dimensions tackled in the educational field internationally. They are opportunity awareness, job requirements, testing aptitudes and involvement. Four experienced English Teachers worked as reviewers. They used a check-list, developed by the researcher, to analyse unit 5 of grade six textbook A and unit 4 of grade nine textbook B. Also, based on result analysis, the researcher conducted an interview with two Omani career guidance specialists from different schools and of different experiences to enrich the interpretation of the study findings. The findings of the study revealed that career guidance in cycle 2 ELT textbooks was roughly referred to in the way Oman vision 2040 was stated. The mean score of the four dimensions was between (0.3 & 0.35) with a standard deviation ranged between (0.26 to 0.30) which indicated a similar views of the reviewers. The study also highlighted that career guidance dimensions were more focused on in grade nine than in grade six, t value for the first pair : Opportunity Awareness in grade 6 and opportunity Awareness in grade 9, was -3.87 which is statistically significant as ($P < .05$) which might be normal. A similar result was noticed in the fourth pair which contains the involvement of the students professional practices as t was -3.875 and it was also statistically significant as ($P < .05$). Regarding the interviews, the interviewees have agreed upon some points and disagreed upon others as there is a big gap between their experiences in terms of level of schools they work in and in terms of years they have spent as career guidance specialists. Although they differed in some issues, both of them agreed upon the significance of exposing young learners to career guidance activities and practices.

Keywords: Career Guidance, ELT, Omani Textbooks, Cycle 1 And Cycle 2 Schools

Introduction

Career guidance is a series of activities and tasks that are usually provided academically in schools or non-academically via some courses or free counselling (Watts, 2013). In the educational field, the target audience is school students of different age groups. In some countries it includes students from grade 5 to grade 12 as it is the case in the Omani schools while in the USA and some other developed countries it is integrated since pre-school stages (Hamood, 2011 as cited in Al-Amri, 2017). These activities are usually aim to achieve one goal which is enabling school students to plan for their future jobs (WBG, 2023) and practice decision-making skill (Al-rashdi, 2021). Parents are usually involved in these activities to be aware of what their children are choosing as future careers and to provide social and emotional

guidance when it is needed (Al-Reyami, 2018). In some schools, parents are given some workshops to realise the significance of career guidance for their kids and their roles as parents in supporting them educational and psychologically (Zahrebenuik, 2023; Al-Badri, 2020). Career guidance activities usually encompass different dimensions. The first one is career or opportunity awareness. To be aware of careers and opportunities in the labour market, students are provided with all of the information needed about different job opportunities in the national and the international labour market (Zahrebenuik, 2023). This awareness can be raised through different practices such as indulging some information in students textbooks in different school subjects, or conducting some workshops for school children by some experts in different fields. The second dimension is the career requirements. This is a sort of personalized guidance where each individual student can get a counselling person who guides him/her towards choosing a career that is tailored to his/her academic abilities, needs and interests. This service is usually provided by the career counsellor or specialist as so called in some countries. In Oman, there are two career specialists in every post-basic school (10-12), and for the future, there is a plan to appoint three in each school that has a population of more than 1000 students (Ministry of Education, 2021).

The third dimension that is usually addressed in career guidance classes, is transition skills. This includes testing aptitudes, readiness, and capacities. The assessment of one's skills in terms of weaknesses and strengths opens one's eyes to polishing the needed skills in the labour market and eliminating the weak ones. This practice grants the child a chance to sharpening his/her skills long time before the real exposure to the labour market (Sharapova, et.al, 2023; WBG, 2023). Tackling this dimension also broadens students' horizons through exposing them to the requirements of the application process which includes writing resume, filling application forms and attaching various documents. The fourth dimension encompass students' engagement in the real world of work. This can be achieved through field trips or what is so called school visits to some establishments such as factories, companies, commercial centres or any other work place. Also, it can be achieved through intern-ships. Although this is quite illegible during school days in the Omani schools as students are committed to textbooks and they need to attend daily classes, it can be achieved during the summer vacations by giving students chances to be trained in the establishments they like to work in in the future. Another easier technique is shadowing where the students are given the chance to watch and observe the jobs they like to practice in the future. Shadowing can be easily done through computer-based learning especially visual reality. This opportunities grant the students the chance to have a clear insight of their future jobs in terms of the demands of each job to prepare themselves well by being fully aware of their choices (Watts, 2013).

Although in Oman there is a remarkable care for career guidance in post-basic schools, the attention could barely be noticed in cycle two schools (5-9) especially in the textbook content. Regarding post-basic schools there is a textbook in career guidance, *Your Career*, for grade 10 and for grade eleven. Although this textbook might work as a guide for the students, based on A'Shehi (2018), it requires a sort of development and enrichment. Not necessarily to have a separate textbook to guide students professionally, but some contents can be integrated within the other subjects. In addition to that, post-basic students are taken to some career guidance symposiums, exhibitions and many other activities that might involve them in a sort of career guidance. Cycle two students lack these types of involvement (Al-Badri, 2014). According to Nordin (2021), integrating these practices at early ages, create a kind of enlightenment for the students and clear vision of their aptitudes, preferences and interests. In this research paper, the researcher aimed to investigate the existence of career guidance dimensions in grade six ELT Omani textbook, particularly unit 5, semester 1 and grade nine textbook precisely unit 4 book B. As these units

are entitled, 'The World of Work' and 'Jobs' respectively. So this research paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is the information given about certain jobs in the textbook sufficient to raise students' awareness of job's opportunities in Oman and the world?
2. Are students provided with the requirements of each presented job so they can prepare themselves mentally, at least, to meet the criteria?
3. Are students given any virtual aptitude tests to examine their current abilities and compare them to the required ones?
4. Are students exposed to any real involvement of future jobs through any sort of engagement strategies?

Methodology

Data collection

To answer these questions, the researcher has developed a career guidance check-list and conducted an interview.

- **Check-list**

The check-list consists of the four main dimensions of career guidance that students are usually guided through: Career-awareness, career-requirements, students' aptitudes and Involvement. Within each dimension, there are five items to be checked in terms of their availability in the target units of grade six textbook, A and grade 9 textbook B (Appendix 1).

- **Interview**

To enrich the research with some real analysis and justifications, the researcher interviewed two career guidance specialists from two different Omani schools. One is from Um-Qais school(10-12) and the other from Wilayyat Bidbid School (5-9). Both schools are in A-Dakhiliya Governorate in the Sultanate of Oman. The researcher chose these two specialists conveniently to get various responses and experiences as they deal with different age groups of students and handle different tasks.

Participants

Four English teachers worked as reviewers of the target units. The participants were provided with the prepared check-list to assess the content of the target units as they were also provided with a soft copy of the target units. The participants were chosen purposefully based on their experience in the field of education as they have already spent more than 16 years in the educational field. Besides, the participant teachers have been teaching different grades, grade six and grade nine are among them. The participants first received the content of unit 5 of grade six ELT textbook A and the check-list. A week later, they received the content of unit 4 of ELT textbook B of grade 9. The gap between the two evaluation process was purposefully allocated in order to avoid any kind of overlapping between the two grades.

Data analysis

Statistical package of social sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the collected data. Some statistical treatments were applied such as central tendency, measures of dispersion, correlation coefficients and reliability, paired-sample t-test and one-way ANOVA.

Validity and Reliability of the check-list

The check-list was validated by a number of teachers from the ministry of education. It was found that

there are some items which are eligible in the Omani educational field so they were replaced by some others suggested by the validators. In terms of reliability, Cronbach Alpha coefficient was applied to investigate the reliability of the tool. First the correlation between each item and its domain was checked. Then the correlation between each domain and the overall mean score of the responses was calculated as well.

Table 1 Reliability Coefficient between each Domain and the Overall Mean Score of the Check-list.

	Opportunity Awareness	Career Requirement	Students' Aptitudes	Involvement
Overall	.68*	.77*	.92*	.83*

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05

The reliability of the four dimensions to the overall mean score of the whole check-list ranged from .68 to .92. This indicates an average to high reliability. So, the tool was reliable and suitable to be applied.

Results

Based on the analysis of the responses as it is shown in table 2, career guidance has rarely been tackled in grade six textbook in the way it's required nowadays. Regarding the first dimension that addresses career or opportunity awareness, the mean score was .30 which indicates that the given information about the 8 jobs in the textbook : Policemen, doctors, artists, astronauts, teachers, fitness instructors and pilots are not sufficient for the students. Also, these jobs are familiar jobs they have been studying them since grade one. There are lots of new jobs have been emerged in the labour market whether governmental or that of the private sector or even the newly managed businesses. These new jobs have not been mentioned or at least referred to in the target unit. Furthermore, the provided content is fixed solid. Each job is attempted from three aspects only, time, place, and its usual chores. Many studies that have detected the impact of career guidance on early ages, have emphasized the positive effectiveness of integrating sufficient information about job opportunities in raising students' awareness about labour market (Al-Amri, et. al, 2017; Nordin, 2021; Sharapova, et.al, 2023). In addition to that, this practice enriches students' general knowledge of various jobs which consequently gets reflected on boosting their confidence and sharpening their decision making skills and their professional maturity (Al-Rashdi, 2017).

Table 2 Means of the Four Dimensions of Career Guidance Check-list

	Mean	St. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Kurtosis
Career Awareness	.300	.258	.068	-.200	4.00
Career Requirements	.300	.258	.068	.000	-1.20
Career Aptitudes	.350	.340	.117	-.2000	-1.289
Real Involvement	.300	.258	.068	-.855	4.00

Job requirements have not been referred to explicitly at all. Students have to infer these requirements by themselves if they wish, through investigating the pictures or reading further if they are that kind of self-

regulated learners. The mean score of the reviewers' responses was .30 which also indicates the scarcity of indulging the requirements of tackled jobs in the lessons. Some skills are mentioned regarding some jobs but roughly. Therefore, more details need to be included in the unit about each job to familiarize the students with required skills, academic qualifications, personal traits and job characteristics (Nordin, 2021). Although six graders are young learners, they are capable of dealing with such kind of information. According to Watts (2013), defining a child's future job leads him/her forwards to achieving his/her goals and making his/her thinking clear and orientated. This process also helps in the national guidance system (Sharapova, et.al, 2023) when the children have been assisted during their early school ages, their career choice will be more appropriate and suitable which might avoid some job-decision making issues.

Regarding the third dimension that encompasses testing aptitudes, the reviewers' responses indicate that textbook content lacks tasks that might test the aptitudes, readiness or the suitability for certain jobs. The mean score of this dimension was .35. Although this might be a virtual practice, it probably has a great impact on students' mental orientation.

It broaden their horizons of the important skills and characteristics that are required in the job market (Al-Reyami, 2018). Consequently this awareness helps in directing their interest towards polishing their skills by strengthening what they already have and develop some new ones (Al-Abedein, 2007). Some countries nowadays appoint career counsellors who help young learners to choose their future jobs. Furthermore there is a day called, Career Day, in some pre-school establishments to discover students' aptitudes and attitudes towards the world of work (Al-Amri, et. al, 2017). This perspective of the policy makers in these countries realize that this process will have its positive impact on creating good citizens where the right man is in the right place (Nordin, 2021).

Although the textbook doesn't include anything regarding real involvement in practising a certain job based on the reviewers' responses, some teachers practise some authentic activities individually within the school community and around through field trips and shadowing. Taking students in a field trip to some establishments might mean a lot for them. Every new academic year, six graders will be awaiting that annual trip as a kind of real life learning. Various goals might be achieved from that trip not only cognitively, but also it might have some impacts socially, emotionally and professionally. Meeting experts and professionals through a school trip yields a different meaning from meeting them as family members or a family friends.

To investigate further and to compare grade six ELT textbook in terms of its inclusion of career guidance dimensions, unit 4 of grade nine textbook B, was analysed too. The results were different to some extent which indicates the gradual integration of career guidance dimensions in the Omani ELT textbooks. However, the version of those textbooks were of 2004 which means the mentalities of the students have changed. In addition to that there awareness towards real world in terms of economy, labour market, skills and many other related concepts have grown. Therefore what now is in grade nine textbook might be better to be introduced in grade six textbook.

So when it is compared the difference is very clear in table 2. The mean score of the participant responses to the first dimension was .20 while in grade 9, it was .70 which highlights a very big gap between the two textbook content in terms of raising the awareness of the students of career opportunities and labour markets. In fact young learners, who are six graders here, are capable of dealing with similar information which are integrated in grade 9 textbook if the layout and the presentation design is attractive. So, raising young learners awarenesses of different job opportunities as nowadays students are learning through social

media, their information is daily updated. If the information is taken from a valid source such as school textbooks, learning becomes more meaningful, trusted and related.

Table 3 Paired Sample Correlation between Grade 6 & Grade 9

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Awareness 1 & Awareness 2	8	.32	.684
Pair 2	Requirements 1 & Requirements 2	8	-.67	.326
Pair 3	Aptitudes 1 & Aptitudes 2	8	.62	.408
Pair 4	Engagement 1 & Engagement 2	8	.316	.684

Based on table 3, r for all the dimensions statistically was not significant which emphasized that there are some correlations between each two pairs of each dimension.

Table 4 Paired Sample T-test of the Impact of the four dimensions with their pairs

	Dimensions	N	Std Error of the means	t	Sig.
Pair 1	Awareness 1 & Awareness 2	8	.13	-3.87	.030
Pair 2	Requirements 1 & Requirements 2	8	.29	-.679	.546
Pair 3	Aptitudes 1 & Aptitudes 2	8	.17	-.577	.604
Pair 4	Engagement 1 & Engagement 2	8	.12	-3.87	.030

Based on table 4, t value for the first pair : Opportunity Awareness in grade 6 and opportunity Awareness in grade 9, was -3.87 which is statistically significant as ($P < .05$). That means there is an obvious differences between the tasks presented in grade 9 that contribute to raising students’ awareness are more than that of grade 6. A similar result can be noticed in the fourth pair which contains the involvement of the students professional practices as t was -3.875 and it was also statistically significant as ($P < .05$). However in terms of the second pair, requirements, there difference between the two grades is slight In terms of the second dimension, career requirements, although the mean is higher in grade nine 0.50 in comparison to that of grade six 0.30, it still low in general. As both textbooks lacks the focus on real needed skills in today’s labour market. Grade nine textbook also lacks that skills which tackle personality and train students to be aware of their personality good traits in order to nourish them and to monitor their bad traits in order to get rid of them. In addition to that, nine graders are rarely given workshops in skills development unless the career guidance counsellor is active and has some initiatives to invite some expertise in society to give students a sort of speech or workshops in this aspect .

In terms of the third dimension of testing aptitudes, students of both grades lack these sorts of tests in spite of their significance. Aptitude tests guide students to discover their weaknesses and strengths. Young learners can become good planners because of the results of such tests. They start planning for their future and search for chances to sharpen their skills as teens are competent and no one would like to be less than others. Based on table 3, aptitude testing dimension scored the least mean score among all dimensions 0.45. Rarely there is a task such as quizzes or scales that make students reflect upon the level of their skills they have or they lack. While this scale is given to ten graders as they are about to choose their subjects for grade 11. So why aren’t students provided with similar scales earlier since the beginning of cycle 2.

To understand the differences between the two grades and to investigate future the perspectives of career guidance specialists towards the development of this issue in the Omani schools, the researcher have interviewed two career guidance specialists. Although they have disagreed upon some issues, their perspectives were similar in many some points. For example, both of them agreed upon integrating career guidance lessons into other subjects such as English, Arabic and Social Studies of cycle 1 and cycle 2 schools. They said that this integration might develop a gradual awareness of the jobs in the national and international labour markets. Also, both stated that having a career day in schools whether annually or per semester, grants the children the opportunity to play the role of their dream jobs. This activity contributes to reducing the percentage of school leavers especially in high schools as it makes students' leaning at school meaningful. Also, they said that conducting this day and specifying an open day for the students who have some small businesses to sell their products at schools plays a great role in illustrating the concept of entrepreneurship. Children learn from each others and tend to exchange ideas indirectly (Zaherabeniuk, 2023). In addition to that both specialists agreed upon the notation of exposing students to practice writing their CV since early ages. They claimed that this strategy might make them value their achievements and jot them down. Therefore, spending 12 years in schools is worthy of accumulating a treasure of achievements. In addition to the CV, filling job application form is considered an interesting experience for the students especially young learners. It represents that real exposure of being an employee.

Regarding the controversial issues they differed upon, they are few. For example, in terms of allocating a career guidance specialist in cycle 1 school. One of the specialists said that it is not necessary at all as any career guidance issue in this stage is not taught in an isolation but it is always integrated within other subjects. She added that learners at this age can't digest the concept of career guidance, all what they can do is knowing jobs names and some of their related activities and chores.

Both of the specialists agreed that the is a sort of contact between career guidance specialists in the ministry of education and the policy makers in the National Career Guidance Centre. They said that different meetings and workshops are periodically conducted to keep them aware of the latests developments in the National Career Guidance Centre. However, they lack the opportunity to be informed about the updates in the labour market.

Conclusion

This research paper aimed to investigate to which extent career guidance dimensions are focused on in the ELT Omani textbooks. Two samples of textbooks were used to be analysed using career guidance checklist. They were grade 6 textbook A, precisely unit 5 and grade 9 textbook B, unit 4. he findings of the study revealed that career guidance in cycle 2 ELT textbooks was roughly referred to in the way Oman vision 2040 was stated. The mean score of the four dimensions was between (0.3 & 0.35) with a standard divination ranged between (0.26 to 0.30) which indicated a similar views of the reviewers. The study also highlighted that career guidance dimensions were more focused on in grade nine than in grade six, t value for the first pair : Opportunity Awareness in grade 6 and opportunity Awareness in grade 9, was -3.87 which is statistically significant as ($P < .05$) which might be normal. A similar result was noticed in the fourth pair which contains the involvement of the students professional practices as t was -3.875 and it was also statistically significant as ($P < .05$). Regarding the interviews, the interviewees have agreed upon some points and disagreed upon others as there is a big gap between their experiences in terms of level of schools they work in and in terms of years they have spent as career guidance specialists. Although they

differed in some issues, both of them agreed upon the significance of exposing young learners to career guidance activities and practices.

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Appendix (1)

Career Guidance Check-list

This check-list list was prepared to check the availability of some career guidance practices within two grades of ELT Omani textbooks.

Dimension	Item	Statement	Yes	No
Career Awareness	1	The content provides enough information about jobs for the students to decide if that job suits them.		
	2	The information is authentic and up to date.		
	3	Most of the current jobs in nowadays world are included in the unit.		
	4	The unit’s content motivates students to read further about jobs.		
	5	The reading texts about jobs are presented in an interesting layout.		
Career Requirement	6	The required skills of every presented job are discussed thoroughly.		

	7	There are some tasks that tackle personality traits.		
	8	Students are given some workshops about some important skills in the labour market.		
	9	There are some tasks that allow students to practice some of their skills in the school.		
	10	Students are asked to list their current skills.		
Testing aptitudes	11	Students are exposed to some virtual tests to assess their abilities of doing certain works.		
	12	Students can decide their future jobs by the end of the unit.		
	13	Students get the chance of meeting the career guidance teacher or counsellor to get some guidance.		
	14	The reading texts give examples of some Omanis who fulfilled their dreams through hard work.		
	15	Students can interact with some experts in the field of the job they like.		
Involvement	16	Students are exposed to filling a sample of job application form.		
	17	Students are guided to the steps of getting a job.		
	18	Students are exposed to Curriculum Vitae (CV) writing.		
	19	Students are taken in an observation tour of some jobs they might have in the future.		
	20	Students are encouraged to practice their future jobs virtually and write a report reflecting upon their experiences.		