

Localising English Language Education in the Gulf Region: Integrating Digital Pedagogies in Foundation Programs

Zahra Zohair Arab^{1*}, Uzma Hasan², Maryam Zohair Arab³ and Swati A Sharma⁴

¹University of Technology and Applied Sciences, Ibri, Oman

²Ibn Sina National College For Medical Studies, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

³Middle East College, Muscat, Oman

⁴Sanjeev Agrawal Global Educational (SAGE) University, Bhopal, India

zahrazohairarab@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The localization of English Language Teaching (ELT) emphasizes the need to adapt teaching practices and curricula to fit culturally diverse environments. In Oman, undergraduate foundation programs often rely on ELT materials published internationally. These may not reflect students' everyday experiences or job needs. This qualitative study looks into lecturers' views on a widely used ELT series and evaluates its cultural relevance in Omani classrooms. Informal interviews with university lecturers uncovered issues such as cultural disconnection, disinterest in content, and low student motivation. To address these, this study proposes a no-code digital platform that uses H5P, Moodle, and locally sourced content. This platform aims to create interactive, culturally relevant learning experiences. It supports Oman Vision 2040 by connecting ELT instruction to national values, digital innovation, and job readiness. The study ends with practical suggestions for incorporating this model into existing learning management systems.

KEYWORDS

Localise English Language, Oman Vision 2040, Digital Pedagogies, H5P-Moodle, Culturally Responsive Teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English plays a crucial role in shaping educational results and job skills in Oman. According to Oman Vision 2040, learning English is seen not just as a way to communicate globally, but also as a means for economic growth and workforce development [1]. However, the current methods used in foundation programs, especially the heavy use of foreign ELT textbooks, bring up concerns about cultural disconnect, lack of engagement, and relevance. While international materials offer high-quality academic content, they often include Western cultural assumptions that may not resonate with Omani students' lives.

Foundation programs, which serve first-year undergraduate students, focus on building essential academic skills like reading, writing, speaking, listening, and critical thinking. Yet, these programs lose effectiveness when students cannot relate to the lesson content. Many educators in Oman have pointed out that students find it hard to connect with examples that focus on the U.S. national parks, European festivals, or Japanese food culture, which can seem distant and irrelevant. This issue highlights wider problems in English Language Teaching (ELT). Teaching materials often focus on native-speaker norms and Western content. This approach overlooks local culture and the identities of learners [2]. This study addresses these issues by examining lecturers' perceptions

and proposing a digital localisation framework that maintains academic standards while improving cultural relevance and student engagement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Localising ELT and the Global South

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has faced significant criticism over the last twenty years, particularly from scholars challenging its colonial roots. Canagarajah [3] argues that ELT has historically acted as a tool of cultural dominance, favouring native-speaker standards and overlooking local languages and knowledge systems. Pennycook [4] supports this view, describing English as a vehicle for Western ideas that has been spread through soft power and institutional support.

Kumaravadivelu [5] introduces the idea of “postmethod pedagogy,” which promotes teaching methods tailored to specific contexts. This approach encourages local educators to modify or reshape methods according to their sociocultural environments. It calls for moving away from Western standards while recognising global varieties of English and local identities, along with the social and political roles of English in different communities.

B. Culturally Responsive Teaching in Arab Gulf States

In the Gulf region, including Oman, ELT is part of larger education reforms aimed at modernisation and internationalisation. However, some scholars point out the conflict between global ELT standards and local cultural values. Al-Kaabi[6] criticises how standardised curricula often erase local identities in teaching practices. Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi [7] note that Omani ELT materials and teacher training often do not focus on culturally based methods.

Students from Gulf countries tend to engage more with content that reflects their surroundings, traditions, and roles in society. When textbook content does not match students’ cultural backgrounds, it can lead to confusion, lack of interest, and poor performance. Rahman [8] suggests that culturally relevant teaching not only boosts engagement but also enhances critical thinking, as learners can draw on familiar social narratives to grasp complex concepts.

C. Technological Integration and Localisation

The use of digital tools in ELT has created new opportunities for customisation. Tools like H5P allow teachers to develop interactive, multimedia tasks that highlight local topics while reinforcing key language skills [9], [10]. According to Luke [11], critical digital teaching methods, when combined with culturally responsive education, can challenge dominant narratives and give a voice to underrepresented groups in education.

In Oman, universities have increasingly adopted Moodle as a learning management system (LMS), providing a solid base for incorporating localised content. By using H5P and Google tools with Moodle, institutions can create scalable solutions that achieve academic goals while reflecting

local cultures. These tools are particularly helpful for institutions facing tight schedules or limited technical resources.

3. LECTURERS FEEDBACK THEMES

Informal interviews were held with seven experienced ELT lecturers from a university in Oman. Each participant had over five years of teaching experience in the foundation program and was familiar with the international ELT materials used. The discussions were confidential and focused on their thoughts about textbook relevance, student engagement, and flexibility. Four main themes emerged:

1. Cultural Dissonance

Lecturers noted that students often had trouble connecting with topics like U.S. national parks, Canadian inventions, or Japanese festivals. These subjects, while interesting to a global audience, felt culturally distant to students. Reportedly, students showed lower enthusiasm and participated less in class discussions that included unfamiliar content.

2. Disengagement and Motivation

Several lecturers mentioned that a lack of engagement often arose when tasks did not connect with students' contexts. While the tasks were well-designed for language learning, students struggled to see real-world applications. This disconnect reduced their motivation to complete assignments and affected their grades.

3. Local Supplementation

To counter these problems, lecturers frequently added local examples to their lessons. However, this was often done in a piecemeal manner without coordination among sections or instructors. One lecturer shared how they adapted a writing assignment about a national park in another country to focus on a local natural site. This change resulted in students writing more detailed and engaging responses.

4. Assessment Challenges

Because of reliance on textbook-centred assessments, students were often graded on material they found culturally inaccessible. Lecturers expressed the need for assessments that reflect students' language development and understanding of their socio-academic context.

4. LOCALIZED TASK EXAMPLE

A localised version of a typical ELT task could centre on “Natural Wonders of Oman” instead of “National Parks in the U.S.” This unit could include the following:

- Reading: An informative text on Wadi Shab, the Empty Quarter, or Ras Al Jinz turtle reserve.

- Listening: Audio interviews with Omani guides discussing environmental conservation.
- Writing: A task inviting students to describe a local natural site and discuss its cultural significance.
- Speaking: Group discussions about preserving local environments for tourism.
- Vocabulary: Terms like wadi, frankincense, date palm, majlis, and halwa.

These tasks can be created using H5P’s content types, such as interactive videos, dialogue cards, and drag-and-drop activities. All materials can be integrated into Moodle and visually enhanced using Canva or Book Creator.

5. PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To implement this localised approach, the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework [12] is used:

- Technological: H5P for creating activities, Moodle for hosting content, Google Forms for assessments, and Canva for visuals.
- Pedagogical: Based on culturally responsive teaching principles and constructivist learning theories.
- Content: Based on local history, geography, traditions, and the demands of 21st-century jobs in Oman.

This framework makes sure the use of technology is meaningful and that localized content aligns with teaching goals and students’ realities. Importantly, this model is scalable, inclusive, and compatible with existing institutional platforms.

6. INTEGRATING DIGITAL INNOVATION INTO ELT LOCALIZATION

To improve localisation in English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum delivery, this study suggests a no-code digital framework that supports both teaching methods and accessibility. The following diagram outlines the key components of culturally responsive ELT using technology:

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE ELT DIGITAL FRAMEWORK

LOCAL CONTENT	DIGITAL TOOLS	PEDAGOGICAL GOALS
Omani topics Traditions Local visuals	H5P + Moodle Google Forms Canva + Notion+ Black Board	Engagement Critical thinking Skills integration

Step-by-Step Integration

1. H5P for Interactive Content: Lecturers create drag-and-drop vocabulary games, reading comprehension tasks, and listening activities that include local themes.
2. Moodle Plugin Installation: IT teams install and enable the H5P plugin so instructors can embed activities directly into Moodle. [13]
3. Google Drive for Resource Storage: Instructors store images, texts, and audio clips relevant to Omani culture and link them to H5P content.
4. Google Forms for Feedback: These forms collect open-ended reflections and audio recordings, especially for speaking and writing activities.
5. Canva for Visual Design: Instructors design lesson headers, infographics, and bilingual guides with Canva to improve presentation.
6. Blackboard for Personalised Learning: This platform is used for conditional content release, tracking progress, self-paced modules, and giving tailored feedback from instructors. Integrated analytics help monitor engagement and performance.

This model ensures accessibility for instructors with limited technical skills while maximising student engagement through personalised and relevant content.

7. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the urgent need to localise English Language Teaching curricula in Oman's foundation programs by focusing on cultural relevance and student engagement. Lecturers' perceptions show that commonly used international ELT materials, while academically strong, often disconnect learners due to cultural differences and limited relevance to local contexts. The suggested integration of digital tools like H5P within Moodle, along with content based on Omani contexts, offers a practical and scalable way to tackle these issues.

By adopting culturally responsive teaching supported by accessible technology, educators can create more meaningful learning experiences that not only boost language skills but also affirm students' identities and get them ready for success in Oman's changing job market. This approach fits well with Oman Vision 2040's focus on innovation, digital change, and preserving cultural heritage in education.

To implement this model, institutions must provide support, ongoing lecturer training, and additional research that includes students' perspectives to fully realise its potential impact. In the end, localising ELT through digital innovation provides a promising path to transform English education in Oman into a truly inclusive and empowering practice.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on the findings and proposed framework, several key recommendations are made:

1. Institutional Adoption of H5P Plugin in Moodle: IT departments should install and support the H5P plugin in Moodle, allowing lecturers to create customized, interactive tasks.

2. Professional Development for ELT Lecturers: Workshops should be organized to train faculty in using H5P, Canva, and Google tools for creating digital content.
3. Creation of a Shared Repository: A joint effort can be started to build a bilingual content library focused on culturally relevant topics.
4. Pilot Testing in One Foundation Course: A semester-long pilot project using localized tasks should be carried out to assess student engagement, performance, and feedback.
5. Further Qualitative Research: Future studies should include focus groups with students to understand their views on localized content and examine the impact of these tools on academic outcomes.
6. Institutions already using Blackboard can integrate localized H5P content or embed Google Forms within course modules. They can use Blackboard's personalized learning features, such as adaptive release, instructor feedback, and analytics tools, for continuous improvement.

These recommendations ensure that ELT curricula not only meet international academic standards but also support the cultural identity and aspirations of Omani learners, contributing to a truly inclusive and forward-thinking educational system.

REFERENCES

- [1] Oman Vision 2040. [Online]. Available: <https://www.2040.om>
- [2] A. Holliday, *The Struggle to Teach English as an International Language*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- [3] A. S. Canagarajah, *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism in English Teaching*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999, ISBN: 9780195127111.
- [4] A. Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. London, UK: Routledge, 1994, ISBN: 9780415075139.
- [5] B. Kumaravadivelu, *Decolonizing Foreign Language Education: The MALA Proposal*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, ISBN: 9780415364302.
- [6] M. Al-Kaabi, "ELT in the GCC: Between Global Standards and Local Identity," *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 23–30, 2020. doi: 10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.8n.4p.23.
- [7] A. Al-Issa and A. Al-Bulushi, "English Language Teaching Reform in Sultanate of Oman: The Case of Curriculum and Pedagogy," *Asian EFL Journal*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 74–96, 2015. [Online]. Available: <https://www.asian-efl-journal.com/main-editions-new/>
- [8] N. Rahman, "Pedagogical Adaptation in Gulf English Classrooms," *TESOL Journal*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. 1–14, 2020. doi: 10.1002/tesj.509.

- [9] L. Hafner, “Digital Literacies and Language Learning,” *Language Learning & Technology*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 1–8, 2020. doi: 10.1016/j.langlt.2020.101666.
- [10] R. Hampel and U. Stickler, “The Use of Technology in Language Learning,” *Language Teaching*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp. 1–20, 2012. doi: 10.1017/S0261444811000528.
- [11] C. D. S. Luke, “Critical Digital Pedagogy and the Decolonization of the Curriculum,” *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 45–58, 2020.
- [12] M. J. Koehler and P. Mishra, “What is Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK)?,” *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 60–70, 2009. [Online]. Available: <https://citejournal.org/volume-9/issue-1-09/general/what-is-technological-pedagogical-content-knowledge-tpack>
- [13] G. Gay, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2010.