



## **An Interplay of Communities of Practice and Multiliteracies Framework: A Case Study of the Uses and Practices of English Literacy in Oman**

**Syerina Syahrin<sup>1a</sup>, Ali Algryani<sup>2ab</sup>, Julius Irudayasamy<sup>3a</sup>**

### **ARTICLE HISTORY:**

Received June 2022  
Received in Revised form August 2022  
Accepted August 2022  
Available online September 2022

### **KEYWORDS:**

ESL  
Literacy  
Oman  
Multiliteracies  
Out-of-school

### **Abstract**

This paper reports the uses and practices of literacy in English among a group of students in the Dhofar Governorate, Sultanate of Oman. Data was gathered from two undergraduate students. The findings of the study suggest that the students experienced rich and varied use of English outside of school than in-school. The study also uncovered that the students' experience with English outside of school is largely afforded by new technologies and that popular culture played a considerable role in their lives. The investigation studied the in-school and out-of-school literacy practices of the two students to evaluate if there are complementing and contrasting features in the two environments. The findings of the study suggest that awareness of how students use and practice English in different communities may enable instructors to integrate elements of literacy outside of school into their school literacy practices to facilitate their learning. By incorporating elements of out-of-school literacy into school literacy, students may be able to engage in meaningful literacy uses and practices that help them to face the growing challenges of using English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which is an important aspect of Oman Vision 2040.

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Email: [sysyahrin@du.edu.om](mailto:sysyahrin@du.edu.om) (Corresponding Author)  
Tel: +968-23237190

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Email: [aalgryani@du.edu.om](mailto:aalgryani@du.edu.om)

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Email: [julius\\_irudayasamy@du.edu.om](mailto:julius_irudayasamy@du.edu.om)

<sup>a</sup> Dhofar University, Sultanate of Oman

<sup>b</sup> The Libyan Academy, Libya

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22034/ijsc.2022.560063.2730>

© 2023 Syahrin, Algryani, and Irudayasamy.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

## 1. Introduction

Oman is composed of multi-ethnic and multilingual identities of its population (Algryani & Syahrin, 2021). The English language is widely recognized as second in importance to the Arabic language. Prior to the 1970s, there is little documented information on the use of the English language in the country (Al-Issa, 2020). According to Al-Issa (2005), the English language was recognized as an official language in the Sultanate of Oman in the 1970s. The English language is used in the government, business, education, legislation, and media and as a tool to serve the development of the nation. The ability to communicate in English well is perceived high in the community. However, several studies uncovered that there is a stark difference in the way English is used among the people in Oman. While a proportion of the students use English in their everyday lives, some of them experience English only in school (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018).

A recent report by EF English Proficiency Index: A Ranking of 112 Countries and Regions in 2021 ranked Oman in the 102<sup>nd</sup> place under the category of “Very Low Proficiency” (English First English Proficiency Index, 2021). In 2013, the World Bank development reported that the majority of Omani high school students did not graduate with the expected standard in the English language (World Bank, 2013). Previous research uncovered several factors that limit students’ learning. These were the examination-oriented schooling system, standardized assessment instruments, and traditional practices that dominated the educational framework in Oman (Al-Ani, 2017). The traditional methods of education, such as memorizing notes and restricting the students’ learning resources to the textbook, are not effective in preparing the students for the language proficiency required at higher learning institutions and the workplace (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). The studies recommended a re-examination of how the English language is taught in Oman.

Central to this study is the recognition that there are two categories of literacy, namely: in-school and out-of-school literacy. Out-of-school literacy plays an important role in everyday life, and that engagement with texts

outside of formal contexts helps structure people’s lives. The definition of both terms, in-school, and out-of-school literacy, is explained in the following section. This investigation provides insight into ways of supporting the students’ literacies by revealing the students’ everyday experiences in English.

Previous research in the field of English language teaching in the Sultanate of Oman uses the terms ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) interchangeably. The operational term that is used to refer to English language teaching in the Sultanate of Oman in this paper is English literacy.

The study explores students’ literacy practices in two categories, namely in-school and out-of-school utilizing New London Group’s (1996) concept of multiliteracies and Wenger’s (2011) Communities of Practice (CoP).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

In this paper, there are two types of literacy that must be considered. Reflecting on Gee’s (2013) work, the two literacies are primary discourse and secondary Discourse. The primary discourse in this paper refers to out-of-school literacy practices that are maintained in their families, with their peers, and within their communities. The secondary discourse in this paper refers to in-school literacy practices and is about privileging examination (Zoino-Jeannetti & Pearrow, 2020) that is dominant across all education sites in Oman. This interpretation of literacy views learning English as neutral or technical skills through practice and schooling.

### 2.1. School Literacy

The pressures of scoring well for examination purposes are not only from across communities, within the communities, and of the individuals that live within the communities but also from international student assessments. The majority of higher learning institutions in Oman, workplaces, and opportunities for scholarship require students to obtain an IELTS certificate and other internationally-recognized certificates. These international standard certificates are considered important as a way of knowing if the national policy for schools’ curricula and instructional efforts and for students’ learning is effective. The return for the investors is to have employees who are literate in English (Al-

Mahrooqi & Tuzlukova, 2014). Therefore, to meet the economic demands, being literate in the English language in Oman refers to the ability to master specific language skills such as writing, reading, and grammar. However, when considered alongside the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies explanation of being literate, these school-taught skills appear to be narrowly focused.

This traditional conceptualization of literacy has dominated the schools in Oman for decades (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012) and in other countries too. Warner-Griffin et.al. (2017) reported that Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) found that one of the reasons that students from minority and/or marginalized communities do not do well in schools compared to mainstream students is that their discourse and literacy practices may differ greatly from formal schooling. Gee (2013) explains that if the Discourse of the child's home is too different from that of school's Discourse, it will lead the students to resist or reject schooling because he/she sees few opportunities afforded by schooling. Cultural compatibility theory assumes that students learn to behave competently in their native cultural context, and schools may expect students to hold certain values and to behave in specific ways that are truly foreign to these students (Gee, 2013).

Literacy practices in schools tend to reflect the dominant culture (Street et al., 2015), and in the case of Oman, English language teaching and learning is largely based on American and English textbooks. Previous investigations discovered that the students preferred the teachers to incorporate more creative teaching approaches instead of the conventional chalk-and-talk and lessons based on textbooks (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Teachers who may not understand the social context of students may judge the students by the standards of their own background and consider them to be lacking in literacy proficiency.

## 2.2. Out-of-School Literacy

For many years, the way literacy is understood has been dominated by the view that learning to read and write is seen as the point of education, and thus the skills acquired for schooling-type literacy are emphasized. This view has been

challenged by recognition of the importance of literacy outside of school (Gee, 2013).

By including everyday literacy to understand the uses and practices of texts, it gives a new, richer, and deeper way of thinking about what is involved in reading and writing (Gee, 2013). In a study such as this that explores the uses and practices of literacy in the English language among a small sample of Omani students, it is essential to take into consideration their out-of-school literacies rather than limiting the examination to their school literacies.

By exploring the students' out-of-school literacies, we gain a broader interpretation of the students' academic achievement, particularly when investigating whether their low academic achievement is due to the differences in literacy practices between home and school (Syahrin, 2021). Studies that explore the incongruities between school and out-of-school literacy practices, such as the work of Dickie (2008) and Syahrin (2021), are important as they suggest possible ways that the students' out-of-school literacy may be supported in school. Additionally, it gives us an opportunity for us to examine their diverse literacy practices, particularly how digital media shaped the way literacy is used and practiced (Coiro et al., 2008).

## 2.3. Street's Ideological Model of Literacy

Street (1995) is an influential researcher who supports the interpretation of literacy as a social and cultural practice. Street (2014) offers two interpretations of literacy, namely the autonomous and ideological models. The autonomous model views literacy as a universal technical skill, detached from social contexts and culture free. It is based on the premise that literacy is autonomous of social context and that it is viewed as a set of skills operating across contexts that can be taught to people with the aim that they go out and use them in their social and cultural worlds. A wider interpretation of literacy is the ideological model, which views literacy as more than just a set of skills but a process that draws on a student's own experiences of literacy and the practices of reading and writing (Street, 2006). This wider interpretation of literacy forms the backdrop of the philosophical stance of this paper.

This paper is based on the premise that positioning literacy in English as social practice

will help explain the aspect of reading as learners participate in meaningful interactions. This way, with literacy viewed in a social practice paradigm, language learning should incorporate elements of belonging to communities of practice, as suggested by Wenger (1998). An interpretation of literacy-based only on skills may be too narrow to explain children's learning (Street et al., 2015).

Street's (1984) models of literacy were based on ethnographic research he conducted in the 1970s in North East of Iran in fruit-growing villages on the border with Afghanistan. This research set the groundwork for the studies of literacy as a social practice that emerged later on. Street found various literacies being used in everyday life by people who were regarded as illiterate, particularly by literacy campaigners associated with the national literacy campaign. Their view was that without the literacy of standardized instruction, the villagers would remain in cognitive, social, and cultural deficits. Street challenged the view by stating that standards for literacy locally were a function of local practices, and a test run by outsiders would not reflect the *tajers* (middlemen who bought fruit from their fellow villagers and sold it elsewhere) literacy. Literacy taught in schools thus turned out to be only one of the literacies that people drew on in the village, and classroom literacy did not have a dominant role in the village because the other literacies were part of the everyday social practices of influential villagers. Besides classroom literacy, there were the literacy practices associated with Quranic schools or *maktabs* concerned with the Islamic religion. *Maktab* students learned the Quran primarily by rote, in Arabic, but the *mullahs* (religious leaders and teachers) would also sometimes add commentaries and also teach vernacular literacy and numeracy (Street, 1984). Some students in the *maktab* extended their literacy learning in Arabic from the *maktab* to reading and writing in the Farsi language, and *mullahs* would sometimes draw on commentaries on the Quran written in Farsi, and they also had Farsi versions of the Quran. Street introduced the term market literacy, also known as autonomous literacy, to refer to the literacy practices of the people in the village, the *tajers* who adapted the reading and writing practices they had learned from the *maktab*. Street (2006) also proposed a new understanding of literacy which would

take notice of the richness and complexity of everyday literacy. This he named the ideological model. Street explained that through the ideological model, local literacy practices by people conventionally classified as illiterate would be acknowledged. He argued that there were variations within literacies and that literacy is always shaped by its social contexts. In order to become literate, learners must acquire the technical skills of reading and writing. Street states that the ideological interpretation does not exclude the technical aspects of reading and writing but argues that these technical aspects of literacy operate within particular social practices.

Street was part of a group of scholars working in the area of literacy whose work has had an impact on concepts of literacy right into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The work of this group of scholars is referred to as the New Literacy Studies.

#### 2.4. Multiliteracies

The term multiliteracies was introduced by the New London Group (NLG). Prominent scholars in the field of literacy pedagogy came together as a group, namely the NLG, to address issues pertaining to the rapid change in literacy due to globalization and technology, as well as the increased cultural and social diversity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). The NLG shaped the way literacy pedagogy is presently viewed by shifting the focus of literacy from merely the comprehension of written text but also visual, audio meanings, gestural, spatial, and multimodal meanings.

Previous studies in sociocultural interpretation of literacy focused their investigations on the learners' first language environment (Yi, 2005). Yi (2005) argued that the functions and uses of literacy in non-English-speaking or bilingual communities are lesser known than the monolingual English-speaking communities. Leu et al. (2004) wrote that graduates experience literacy in school with traditional tools such as paper, pencil, and books. On the other hand, their out-of-school experience with literacy is complex and diverse as they engaged in information and communication technologies which include "Web logs (blogs), word processors, video editors, World Wide Web browsers, Web editors, e-mail, spreadsheets, presentation software, instant messaging, plug-ins for Web resources, bulletin boards, avatars,

virtual worlds, and many others” (p. 1571). Comprehending these types of technologies requires the knowledge of multiple literacies. The New London Group’s (1996) concept of multiliteracies made a case for literacy pedagogy to capitalize on the new media, which has more potential for second language learners to have greater autonomy in different spheres of their life.

### 2.5. Communities of Practice (CoP)

The theory of CoP is not concerned specifically with literacy studies, but it can be used to understand learning. Although the theory of CoP and literacy as social practice studies developed in different fields, they had common roots in the social approach to learning (Barton & Hamilton, 2005).

The notion of apprenticeship in CoP was derived from the way learning was accomplished in communities where there was no formal schooling. The concept of apprenticeship was used to describe how knowledge was transmitted and shared among members of a community of practice, particularly between experts and novice members through apprenticeship (Wenger, 2011). According to Wenger (2011), the apprenticeship model makes the process of thinking visible. Adapting the concept of apprenticeship into literacy learning gives access to the ways learners acquire the skills and knowledge within their communities (Syahrin, 2021). Take, for instance, the community of gamers, novice gamers may acquire the skills of a particular video game through practice and collaboration with expert gamers. The novice gamers learn not only the skills of the game but also the language associated with it.

The CoP theory and sociocultural concept of learning are structured within a being “situated in practice” (Wenger, 2011) and support the argument that what is vital is not the decontextualized skills of literacy but the practices to which people put the skills. By using Wenger’s (2011) CoP theory to seek an

understanding of people’s engagement with literacy in their everyday lives, people’s social interaction in their socialization process into the community can be examined in ways that are textually mediated (Barton, 2009). This may add to understanding the social factors that shape the uses of literacy for individuals.

### 3. Methodology

In order to have an understanding of the students’ uses and practices of literacy in school and out-of-school environments, the focus of the research has to be on the students’ themselves. Thus, this research aims to empower the students to document their own literacy practices to provide an insider view. Qualitative data on the students’ uses and practices of literacy in English were gathered in order to answer the research questions below:

1. What are the students’ uses and practices of literacy in English in their out-of-school environments?
2. What are the students’ uses and practices of literacy in English in the school environment?
3. What are the complementing and contrasting features of the two environments?

The findings presented in this paper are gathered from two students. The students’ identity was protected by allowing them to select their own pseudonyms. Their pseudonyms reflected the pop culture, their interest, and identity. The table below summarizes the students’ profiles. It is important to note that the term “school” is used broadly to represent an educational institution. The participants of the study are undergraduate students at a university in the Sultanate of Oman.

#### 3.1. Participants

The summary of the students’ profile is detailed below.

**Table 1**  
*Profile of the Participants*

Profile	Case Study 1: Jisoo	Case Study 2: Turgut Alp
Age	22	22
Gender	F	M

Family structure	Two younger siblings	One older sibling and five younger siblings
Personality	Jisoo described herself as an introvert. She does not have many friends in school and enjoys the company of a small group of friends.	Turgut Alp describes himself as easygoing and has the tendency to procrastinate. He explained that he often finds himself doing assignments at the last minute. He felt that with better time management, he would score better in the examinations.
Language 1	Arabic	Local dialect (Jibali)
Other languages spoken at home	Local dialect (Jibali) English	Arabic
House location	City	Rural (mountain)

### 3.1.1. Cultural, Linguistic, and Family Background of the Participants

#### 3.1.1.1. Case Study 1: Jisoo

Jisoo is a 22-year-old female undergraduate student majoring in Business. Jisoo, a pseudonym used by the student, represents a member of Blackpink, a Korean girl band. In recent years, the influence of Korean K-pop has reached the Sultanate of Oman. Jisoo enjoys watching Korean television series and movies on Netflix. She also enjoys listening to Korean songs. She explained that although she does not understand the Korean language, she is determined to learn it. She explained that it is difficult to learn the language when there are no language centers or friends to practice the language with.

Jisoo speaks Arabic at home with her family members. She is from a particular tribe that is largely known to use the local dialect, Jibali. However, according to Jisoo, her mother preferred the students to speak Arabic and English at home. Jisoo lives in the city in a neighborhood that predominantly speaks Arabic. She uses Jibali when communicating with her grandmother and relatives. Jisoo's family's housemaid comes from the Philippines. The maid and Jisoo are about the same age, and they share similar interests. In the evenings, Jisoo watches the television with her maid, and they communicate in English.

#### 3.1.1.2. Case Study 2: Turgut Alp

Turgut Alp is a 22-year-old male undergraduate student majoring in Education (Teaching English). He is in his second year of university study. Turgut Alp, a pseudonym used by the student, represents the name of one of the

characters in a popular Turkish television series, Resurrection Ertugul. According to Turgut Alp, Turkish films and television series are well-enjoyed among the younger generation in Oman. There are also many Turkish restaurants established in Salalah, a city in the Dhofar Governorate. Turgut Alp lives in the mountains with his family. He belongs to a particular tribe that uses the local language, Jibali. Turgut Alp uses Arabic at school, with his peers who do not speak Jibali, and in formal contexts. He uses Jibali with his family, relatives, and in the neighborhood. Turgut Alp speaks English fluently too.

Unlike Jisoo, Turgut Alp is not invested in learning a foreign language such as the Turkish language. He knows a few words and phrases in Turkish, which he learned through the television series. Turgut Alp has been to Turkey several times. As he revealed, Turkey is one of Omani's favorite travel destinations. In his free time, he enjoys playing football and video games. He plays football in his neighborhood as well as in the city. Turgut Alp has friends from different nationalities whom he plays football and video games with. He speaks English with his international peers.

## 3.2. Instruments

In order to provide an insider's view of the students' uses and practices of literacy in English in-school and out-of-school settings, the study utilizes Photovoice as the method for data collection.

### 3.2.1. Photovoice

Photovoice is a type of qualitative inquiry that employs documentary photography and storytelling, typically through dialogue (Save

the Children, 2014). Other terms that use a similar approach are photo-elicitation (Allan, 2012) and participatory photo interviews (Jorgenson & Sullivan, 2010). In this investigation, the students were assigned to record their own uses and practices of literacy in English that represent their lives with their mobile phones. The photos that the students captured were reflected through dialogue in which they explained their own photos (Wang et al., 2000). The techniques through photovoice are relevant to this study because it enables the students to capture their voices about their lives (Wang et al., 1996). The idea of Photovoice is similar to Freire's concept of conscientization which aims to empower individuals and marginalized groups that may have been excluded from the decision-making process within society. This method challenges the conventional power play of representation by "shifting control over the means for documenting lives from the powerful to the powerless ... and the observer to the observed" (Booth & Booth, 2003, p. 432). Furthermore, this technique allows people to tell their stories in their own voices through the images they documented themselves (Wang et al., 1998)

The main data source was the interview centered on the students' photos. Through Photovoice, the uses and practices of the literacy journey experienced by the two Omani students have been brought to the fore as they participated in local and global multiliteracies.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Student 1: Jisoo

The images of Jisoo's out-of-school literacy uses and practices showed that she was exposed to an extensive amount of English through various media. Her experience in English appeared to be replete with media technology and popular culture, particularly Korean pop culture.

She is invested and determined to learn Korean. She shared an image of a phone application called Duolingo. Duolingo is a game-like language learning application that she uses to learn the Korean language. She uses English for translation. Jisoo elaborated that translating Korean texts to English and to Arabic helped improve her English literacy significantly. She listens to Korean music (K-pop) as well as

popular English songs on YouTube and Spotify. Spotify is a music application.

The majority of Jisoo's literacy in the home reflected her engagement with new media technologies such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. The images from her social media, which represent what she values, included motivational quotes in English, a screenshot of memes, and photo captions. Jisoo explained that she uses social media for entertainment and learning. Jisoo explained that she follows Arabic, English, and Korean-speaking content creators. She enjoys watching the latest fashion trends, make-up trends, and tutorials, as well as food recipes. Jisoo added that through Snapchat, she learned about new and hip cafes in the city, recommendations for beauty parlors, and places to buy Arabic clothing from the people she follows.

Jisoo further explained that although she spends a large amount of her free time on social media, it was not all in vain. She revealed that she is careful in choosing who she follows on Instagram and TikTok. She discussed how by following the "right" account, her social media feed became a place for learning. She explained how she learned history, fun facts, social issues, and mindfulness through social media. Although she enjoyed her time on social media, she did not create or post any content. She explained that her family and local cultural expectations impede her engagement on social media as a content creator.

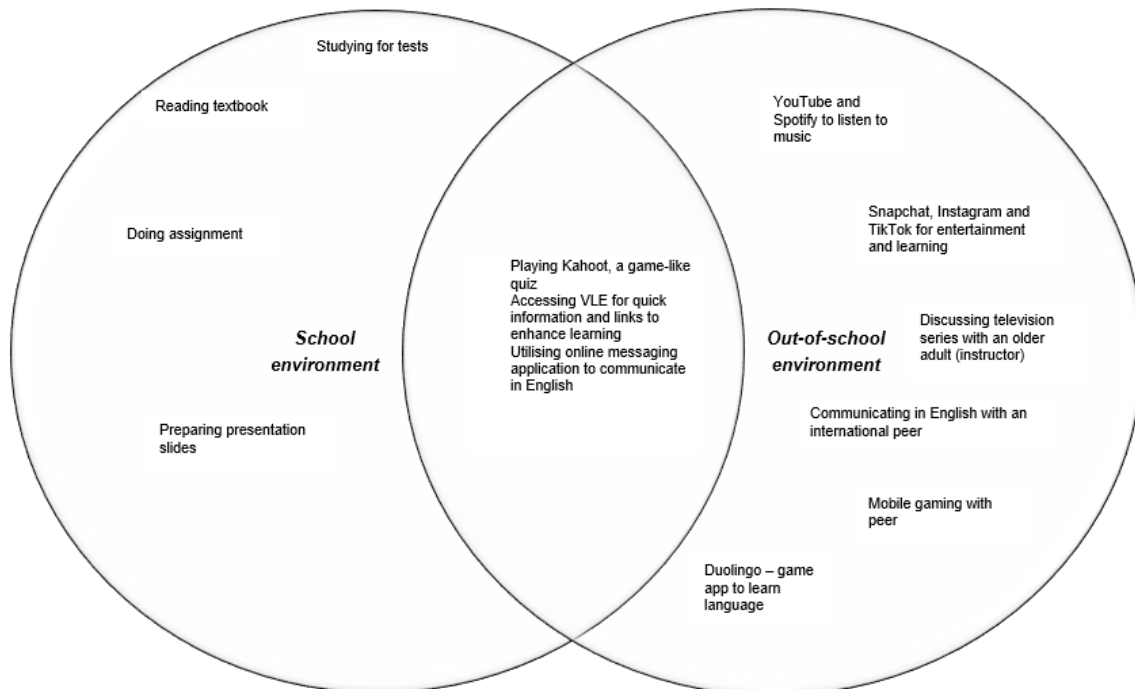
Jisoo's everyday literacy practices also involved interacting with others. She gave examples of an instructor, a close friend, and a messaging application. Over the past several months, she had been meeting with an instructor from South Korea after class. They communicated in English and basic Korean language. Their conversation was typically about different Korean television series. Jisoo's close friend is from Sri Lanka. The common language that they share is English. Jisoo and her friend enjoy having coffee breaks together. They also compete against each other in the Cookie Run Kingdom, a mobile-gaming application that is trending in South Korea. For the majority of the time, Jisoo uses Arabic on WhatsApp, an online messaging application. She uses English when communicating with her peers about specific assignments or homework.

Jisoo elaborated that she wanted to use more English in her daily texts, but she was worried she would be perceived negatively by her peers.

The images Jisoo chose to represent her in-school literacy practices were fewer than her experience with out-of-school literacy. The images included the cover of the textbook for one of her courses, her written assignment, a power-point presentation, and test papers. Jisoo described that the majority of the instructors assigned students with written assignments and presentations. She found classroom presentations to be dull as the majority of the classmates did not make the presentation slides interactive and engaging. She added that the majority of the instructors were not competent with technology,

too, as the teaching presentations were notes copied from the textbooks and were presented to the class.

Jisoo gave one example of a course where the lessons were more interactive. She shared a screenshot of Moodle, a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) used by the University for formal online instruction. Although the University has transitioned from online to physical school post-pandemic, one of her instructors actively used the VLE. Jisoo enjoyed the particular course as she was able to access announcements, reading materials, and video-teaching materials and played Kahoot, a game-like quiz, to enhance her learning.



**Figure 1**

*Summary of Jisoo's Uses and Practices of In-school and Out-of-school Literacy in English*

#### 4.2. Student 2: Turgut Alp

Turgut Alp's out-of-school literacy in English reflected the less traditional forms of literacy. He shared a video clip that showed him playing a web-based video game while streaming live and communicating with players from other countries in English. Turgut Alp explained that Twitch is a video-streaming website that enables people to watch others play video games. According to Turgut Alp, Twitch is popular among gamers. He further explained that through Twitch, he learned video-gaming

terms in English, which otherwise he would not have heard. The community of gamers on Twitch consists of novice and expert players. Turgut Alp has asked the researchers not to reveal the names of the video games he played as he feared it might be a cause for conflict.

In addition to online gaming, Turgut Alp gave examples of his literacy uses and practices in English on social media. This included Twitter and an online forum. He uses Twitter to read news about English football and participates in an online forum to discuss video games. He



uses the online forum only on occasions when he gets stuck with the game and needs tips and advice.

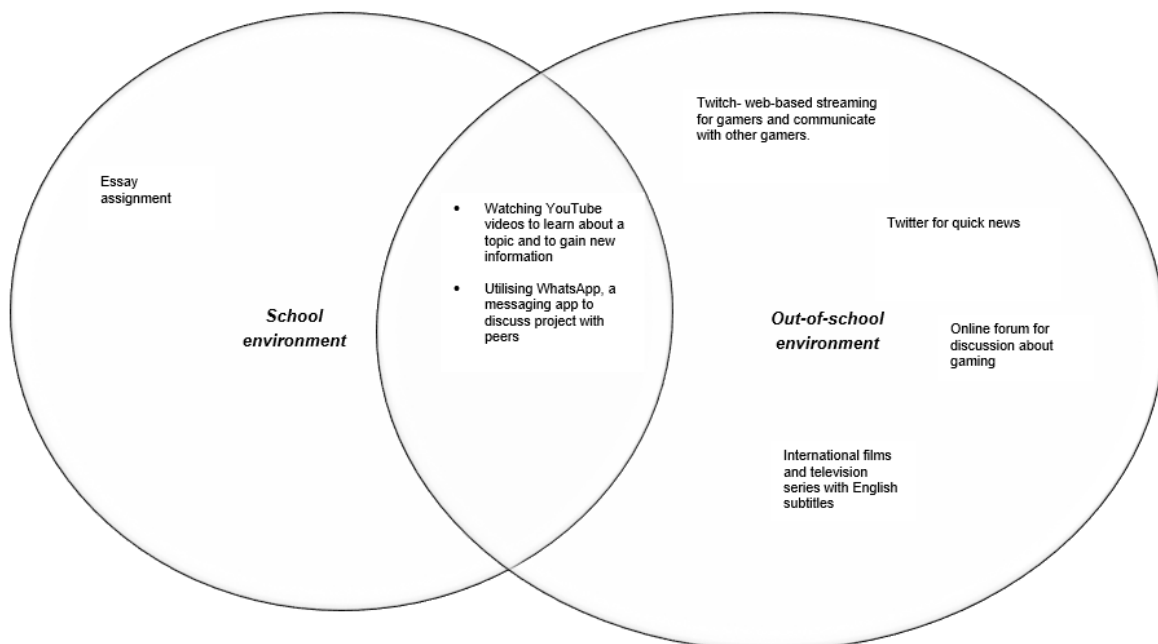
Turgut Alp shared a photo of his cousin and a close friend. He explained that he watches the Turkish series Resurrection Ertugul, with his cousin. Whenever they watch Turkish television series, they put on English subtitles instead of Arabic. Occasionally, he goes to the cinema with his cousin and a close friend. They enjoy watching action movies in English.

Turgut Alp shared a screenshot image of YouTube that reads, "Test Speakers". He explained that he uses YouTube to gain information and not for entertainment. Although there is much YouTube content in Arabic, he prefers the English content as the information is more varied. In the example that he provided, he used YouTube to test the speakers of his phone.

For the uses and practices of English in the

school context, Turgut Alp gave an example of an essay assignment that he had written for one of his courses. He explained that the majority of the courses require a written assignment. He also gave an example of a YouTube video. He elaborated that he uses YouTube videos and follows specific channels such as TED to gain new information. It also helped him to get an overview of topics relevant to his courses. He found it helpful in preparing him for a class. In the photograph that he shared, he watched a TED talk on "How languages shape the way we think". He commented that a few of his instructors use YouTube videos in the school, but he sometimes felt the videos were irrelevant.

Turgut Alp also shared a WhatsApp screenshot of the conversation he had with the students in the United States. Turgut Alp is among the students who were selected to be in a virtual student exchange program. The program requires students to collaborate on a cross-cultural research project.



**Figure 2**

*Summary of Turgut Alp's Uses and Practices of In-school and Out-of-school Literacy in English*

## 5. Discussion

The students provided insiders' views of their own diverse literacy practices in school and out-of-school contexts. Although the majority of the students' literacy practices in English appeared to be for entertainment and leisure,

there was a certain amount of useful complementing and contrasting features between the two literacies.

### 5.1. Complementary Relationships

The most common photos the students presented of their out-of-school environments

illustrated the students in their homes. These photos show that the students have smartphones, gaming devices, computers, and connections to the Internet. The students did not offer much insight into print-based materials in their photos, with the exception of texts relating to their school literacy practices. The mobile phone is used extensively with the Internet. The students' interactions with their peers outside the school provide examples of how these people, as social partners, contributed to and mediated the students' uses and practices of English literacy.

The kinds of activities that the students engaged in outside the school environment illustrated particular social practices where English was used within meaningful contexts. These activities involved mutual engagement through interactions with peers, whether it is face-to-face or online (Wenger, 2011). The students' experience with the textually mediated social world (Barton & Hamilton, 2005) in English was largely facilitated by technology with little in the way of traditional forms of book texts. The examples of their English experiences outside of school are outlined as follows:

- Utilizing social media sites for entertainment and learning instead of social contact
- Utilizing an online messaging application to communicate in English
- Reading popular culture texts such as game texts, musical texts, televisual and film texts
- Reading online texts to acquire information
- Reading and writing to support school literacy

The students valued literacy practices in English relating to popular culture texts and the new media technology. The implication that can be drawn from the findings is that having an understanding of the students' everyday engagement with English in both contexts, it helps reveal what engages the students in learning and what sustains their interest. The findings from the study showed that the school made some links between the students' in-school and out-of-school literacy activities. These included utilizing VLE, getting students to participate in game-like language learning activities (Kahoot), and media resources (YouTube). Although the school made some

links to the students' out-of-school literacy, the instances that the students provided were insufficient in comparison to their diverse out-of-school literacy practices. This paper makes a case for more in-class opportunities to expand on students' existing knowledge and serve as a link between what they already know and what they need to know at school because it gives students the chance to develop a deeper understanding of the language (New London Group, 1996). This could be especially helpful as a way to interest and motivate students who do not value studying English with traditional textbooks.

The findings revealed how the students capitalized on the English language and used it as a tool to move from their local culture to a more globalized culture, such as gaming and accessing the Internet. Within the activities that the students recorded, they revealed the literacy practices that were valued by certain cultural subgroups, which represented expert systems that resembled apprenticeship activities (Wenger, 2011). An important implication of this finding is that the majority of their engagement with English literacy emerged with their peers rather than with adults. There was only one example given by Jisoo, who engaged with a South Korean instructor in English.

The complementary relationship between the students' out-of-school literacy and their school was revealed primarily through the attempts made by the instructors and the interactions with their peers. Given the potential significance of out-of-school literacy, the implication that can be drawn from this finding is that if the students' expert knowledge in out-of-school contexts can be built on in the school context, then the literacy practices may be more meaningful and relevant to their lives.

Although this is a case of a small sample of students from the Dhofar Governate in the Sultanate of Oman, the findings reject the deficit view of the Omani students as low achievers and incompetent at the English language as reported by the English First Index (English First English Proficiency Index, 2021). Instead, the findings illustrate the complexity and the strength of the students' out-of-school literacy and their engagement with a wide variety of English texts. The implication that can be drawn from this finding is that there may be areas of the students'

expertise, particularly the knowledge that was appropriated in their out-of-school literacy that was not measured in standardized tests. Students who grow up in a digitally connected media-rich world, such as the students in this study, appeared to be disadvantaged because their literacy development is mainly judged through what may be viewed as a restricted strand of reading with print, exam-type materials (Singal and Swann, 2011).

## 5.2. Contrasting Relationships

While there were areas where the relationships were in contrast to one another, there were complementing relationships between their school and out-of-school environments. Conflict arises when the students describe that their out-of-school literacy practices are perceived narrowly by their parents and adult members of their family. The students explained that when they engage with English texts that do not fit for schooling, the family views it as time spent doing unnecessary things and that it does not contribute to their deep and meaningful engagement with English literacy (Norton, 2014).

The interviews with the students and the pictures they shared demonstrate that they used the new media technologies to develop their literacy outside of school more than they did in school. The students had mastered expert skills in using technology and navigating online sources in an out-of-class literacy setting. Maximizing the opportunities for students to discover their own voices through new multimedia and hypermedia channels, virtual communities, and another popular culture is one method language instructors might need to consider to make learning more meaningful to the students (New London Group, 1996).

The findings of the study also showed a mismatch of values between the students' engagement with literacy afforded by technology, in particular, the use of social media. The students in the study valued their participation in social media and used it extensively in their everyday lives (Bocar & Jocson, 2022). This was exemplified by Jisoo, who explained that she used social media only as a consumer of entertainment and learning rather than as a producer or content creator. Conflict arose because her family and the local community viewed a female student's engagement with

social media as outside the expectation for a Muslim female to retain a modest image. The student, on the other hand, viewed her engagement with social media as a tool that facilitated her English learning.

An example of the contrasting relationships between how the resources with the Internet and the computer were used in the school and out-of-school environments is the use of power-point presentations, as reported by Jisoo. Jisoo described that the majority of her instructors assigned students to do classroom presentations. However, the method used was similar to how chalkboards have been used in schools for decades. Students were instructed to face the front of the room and watch the presentation on the screen.

The photos and interviews with the students revealed that the majority of the texts they valued and engaged with in their daily lives were in English. When asked about the conversations they had with their social partners about their literacy practices, the students revealed that the conversations took place in Arabic, Jibali, Korean, English, and mixed languages, as it depends on who they were talking to. The interactions between the students and their social partners are examples of Barton's (2009) concept of a textually-mediated social world. The topic of conversation in their world was created in the presence of a text. This was exemplified by Jisoo, who described that her interactions with the South Korean instructor were about television series, and Turgut Alp, who described his interactions with his online peers were about gaming. The students' participation in English literacy practices with their social partners reflects Wenger's (2006) concept of apprenticeship, in which the students gain skills and knowledge of new media technology and popular culture. The translanguaging strategy used in their interactions about different texts reflects the different roles that languages play for multilingual speakers, which could explain how it facilitated their negotiation of meaning with English texts (Creese & Blackledge, 2015). Translanguaging is a new term in the language field that refers to multilingual speakers switching between languages in their natural environment (Park, 2013). Rather than focusing solely on literacy for schooling, the students in this study aspired to acquire skills

and knowledge for a broader education. They valued literacy practices involving popular culture texts and new media technology, and they described how their participation in out-of-school literacy aided their school literacy and English language learning. However, the cultural and social perspectives of their community may be conflicted about the value of the popular culture texts that their students engaged with. This was exemplified by Turgut Alp, who asked the researchers not to disclose the names of the video games he played. There were newspaper reports suggesting the banning of video games as they were considered additive and contradicted local values.

According to the findings of this study, the diversity of technology available to students, as well as the growing number of textual forms provided by various multimedia in English outside of school, necessitates a reconsideration of the relevance of the types of literacy approved by schools. This paper argues that educational institutions could consider broader and more complex dimensions of multiliteracies in English to prepare students for the skills they need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Adilbayeva et al., 2022). While some connections were made by the instructors to involve students to participate in activities in English, this study argues that educational institutions could provide students with increased opportunities to use English by expanding resources that reflect students' out-of-school literacy. The implication is that if students were given more opportunities to engage with literacy that they value while also making connections to school literacy, they would be more likely to succeed in school. It may be useful for language instructors to adapt current practices by including students' popular culture interests

The findings of this study suggest that students are able to engage in diverse literacy practices in English through peer interactions. As a result, one way for teachers to promote students' acquisition of English literacy is to recognize them as co-producers in acquiring the skills and knowledge, as well as to make effective use of collaborative learning and group work. Incorporating students' out-of-school literacy would provide opportunities for them to capitalize on their current practices and take part in an activity that has personal significance in their daily lives while also

assisting them in learning English. This may allow the students to gain confidence as their expertise in technology is acknowledged.

An avenue for future research is a replication of this study with students from different cultural backgrounds as well as different age groups in different ESL and EFL contexts. This could assist in addressing issues of the types of literacy the students value, how their learning is mediated and how by having an awareness of different groups of students' social and cultural backgrounds, teachers may support their learning in school. Future research could explore how teachers make effective links to the students' out-of-school literacy and the knowledge appropriated from that into the school and a further investigation into whether it influenced the students' learning in school.

## References

- Adilbayeva, U., Mussanova, G., Mombekova, N., & Suttibayev, N. (2022). Digital communication technology for teaching a foreign language and culture through reading. *International Journal of Society, Culture & Language*, 10(3), 21-30. <https://doi.org/10.22034/ijscsl.2022.543110.2472>
- Al-Ani, W. T. (2017). Alternative education needs in Oman: Accommodating learning diversity and meeting market demand. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 22, 322-336.
- Algryani, A., & Syahrin, S. (2021). Utilizing learners' linguistic landscape as a pedagogical resource in the translation classroom: A case study in the Sultanate of Oman. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 12. <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no1.24>
- Al-Issa, A. S. (2005). An ideological discussion of the impact of the NNESTs' English language knowledge on ESL policy implementation 'a special reference to the Omani context'. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(3), 98-112.
- Al-Issa, A. S. (2020). The language planning situation in the Sultanate of Oman. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 21(4), 1-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664208.2020.1764729>
- Allan, A. (2012). Power, participation and privilege-methodological lessons from

- using visual methods in research with young people. *Sociological Research Online*, 17(3), 256-266. <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.2662>
- Al-Mahrooqi, R. (2012). A student perspective on low English proficiency in Oman. *International Education Studies*, 5(6), 263-271. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v5n6p263>
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Denman, C. (Eds.). (2018). *English education in Oman: Current scenarios and Future Trajectories* (Vol. 15). Springer.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Tuzlukova, V. (2014). English communication skills and employability in the Arabian Gulf: The case of Oman. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 22(2), 473-488.
- Barton, D. (2009). Understanding textual practices in a changing world. In M. Baynham, & M. Prinsloo, (Eds.), *The future of literacy studies* (pp. 38-53). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1057/9780230245693.pdf>
- Barton, D., & Hamilton, M. (2005). Literacy, reification and the dynamics of social interaction. In D. Barton, & K. Tusting (Eds.), *Beyond communities of practice: Language power and social context* (pp. 14-35). Cambridge University Press.
- Bocar, A., & Jocson, G. (2022). Understanding the challenges of social media users: Management students' perspectives in two Asian countries. *Journal of Business, Communication & Technology*, 1(1), 24-34. <https://doi.org/10.56632/bct.2022.1103>
- Booth, T., & Booth, W. (2003). In the frame: Photovoice and mothers with learning difficulties. *Disability & Society*, 18(4), 431-442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0968759032000080986>
- Coiro, J., Knobel, M., Lankshear, C., & Leu, D. J. (2008). Central issues in new literacies and new literacies research. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear, & D. J. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of research on new literacies* (pp. 1-21). Erlbaum.
- Cope, B., & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). (2000). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures*. Psychology Press.
- Creese, A., & Blackledge, A. (2015). Translanguaging and identity in educational settings. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 20-35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190514000233>
- Dickie, J. G. (2008). *An investigation of sites, uses and practices for literacy in the lives of Pasifika students*. <http://research.archive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/369>
- English First (EF) English Proficiency Index (2021). *Oman*. <https://www.ef.com/assetscdn/WIBIwq6RdJvcD9bc8RMd/c/efcom-epi-site/reports/2021/ef-epi-2021-english.pdf>
- Gee, J. P. (2013). Discourse and the new literacy studies. In Gee, J. P., & Handford, M. (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis* (pp. 397-408). Routledge.
- Jorgenson, J., & Sullivan, T. (2010). Accessing children's perspectives through participatory photo interviews. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(1), 1-19.
- Leu, D. J., Kinzer, C. K., Coiro, J. L., & Cammack, D. W. (2004). Toward a theory of new literacies emerging from the Internet and other information and communication technologies. In R. B. Ruddell & N. J. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical models and processes of reading* (5<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 1570-1613). International Reading Association.
- Ministry of Education Oman. (2018). *The national strategy for education 2040*. <https://www.educouncil.gov.om/downloads/Ts775SPNmXDQ.pdf>
- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-93.
- Norton, B. (2013). Identity, literacy and the multilingual school. In S. May (Ed.), *The multilingual turn: Implications for SLA, TESOL, and bilingual education* (pp. 103-122). Routledge.
- Park, M. S. (2013). Code-switching and translanguaging: Potential functions in multilingual schools. *Teachers College, Columbia University Working Papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics*, 13(2), 50-52. <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8HH6JPQ>
- Save the Children (2014) *Photovoice Guidance: 10 simple steps to involve children in needs assessments*. <https://bangladesh>.

- savethechildren.net/sites/bangladesh.savethechildren.net/files/library/Photovoice\_needs\_assessment\_guidelines\_full\_report\_0.pdf
- Singal, N., & Swann, M. (2011). Children's perceptions of themselves as learner inside and outside school. *Research Papers in Education*, 26(4), 469-484. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520903281617>
- Strawn, C., & Monama, G. (2012). Making Soweto stories: Photovoice meets the new literacy studies. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 31(5), 535-553. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02601370.2012.693957>
- Street, B. (1984). *Literacy in theory and practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Street, B. (2006). Autonomous and ideological models of literacy: Approaches from new literacy studies. *Media Anthropology Network*, 17, 1-15.
- Street, B. (2014, April 27). *The LETTER project: Learning for empowerment through training in ethnographic research* [Webinar]. Global Conversations in Literacy Research Web Seminar Series. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFKPiGgNJ4E>
- Street, B., Pishghadam, R., & Zeinali, Z. (2015). Changes and challenges of literacy practices: A case of a village in Iran. *International Journal of Society, Culture, and Language*, 3(1), 16-27.
- Street, B. (1995). *Critical approaches to literacy in development, ethnography and education*. Longman.
- Syahrin, S. (2021). Literacy uses and practices of school children living in a contemporary Malaysian context. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online)*, 46(10), 43-61. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.192081633137102>
- Wang, C. C., Cash, J. L., & Powers, L. S. (2000). Who knows the streets as well as the homeless? Promoting personal and community action through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice*, 1(1), 81-89. <https://doi.org/10.1177/152483990000100113>
- Wang, C. C., Yi, W. K., Tao, Z. W., & Carovano, K. (1998). Photovoice as a participatory health promotion strategy. *Health Promotion International*, 13(1), 75-86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/13.1.75>
- Wang, C., Burris, M. A., & Ping, X. Y. (1996). Chinese village women as visual anthropologists: A participatory approach to reaching policymakers. *Social Science & Medicine*, 42(10), 1391-1400. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(95\)00287-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(95)00287-1)
- Warner-Griffin, C., Liu, H., Tadler, C., Herget, D., & Dalton, B. (2017). *Reading achievement of US fourth-grade students in an international context: First look at the progress in international reading literacy study (PIRLS) 2016 and ePIRLS 2016*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED578163.pdf>
- Wenger, E. (2011). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235413087\\_Communities\\_of\\_Practice\\_A\\_Brief\\_Introduction.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235413087_Communities_of_Practice_A_Brief_Introduction.pdf)
- World Bank (2013). *Education in Oman: The drive for quality: Summary report (Arabic)*. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/513751468288663265/pdf/757190ESW0v10W0eport0Summary-Arabic.pdf>
- Yi, Y. (2005). *Immigrant students' out-of-school literacy practices: A qualitative study of Korean students' experiences*. [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send\\_file?accession=osu1118856037&disposition=inline](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/!etd.send_file?accession=osu1118856037&disposition=inline)
- Zoino-Jeannetti, J., & Pearrow, M. (2020). Exploring power: An examination of social privilege and social capital of future educators. *Educational Studies*, 56(5), 506-518. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2020.1799218>