

Spotlight on Oman's Specialized Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT)

by ALI SALEH AL RIYAMI, DR. RAYA SULEIMAN AL-RISI, and KIM CHILMONIK

The Specialized Institute for Professional Training of Teachers (SIPTT) is Oman's national hub for professional development for all public-school teachers, principals, and supervisors at every stage of their careers. SIPTT was established by Oman's Ministry of Education in 2014 to revolutionize classroom education and elevate the nation's educational standards. It operates out of the capital of Oman, Muscat, but also manages 11 regional centers across Oman to extend the institute's reach and ensure teachers have access to professional-development opportunities nationwide.

There are more than 150 trainers at SIPTT. Of those trainers, just over 30 work to support public-school English teachers across Oman. These trainers bring a wealth of experience and expertise in English language education and teacher training. All trainers possess at least a bachelor's degree in English or English language teaching, with many holding advanced degrees such as master's and PhD degrees in TESOL, language education, and curriculum design. Their academic backgrounds are complemented by international experiences, including participation in programs like the Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) program in the United States. Additionally, all SIPTT

trainers have extensive classroom experience, with most having taught English for eight to over 20 years. As trainer Bahia Al Dhawi noted, "I have over 12 years of experience in teacher training. Prior to that, I worked as an English language teacher in a public school, where I taught students from grades 7 to 12."



The SIPTT building in Muscat, Oman



Omani educators exploring American English materials

There are many different pathways to becoming a SIPTT trainer. Many trainers come to SIPTT after long careers as teaching staff, senior teachers, or supervisors. For some trainers, teacher training was a long-term goal, while others were nominated or encouraged to apply due to their experience and qualifications. Trainer Abdullah Al Araimi reflected, “teacher training was something that I wanted to do after spending 15 years on teaching. I started conducting workshops at my school, and then I joined professional training programs that really polished my training skills.”

The process typically includes applying through the Ministry of Education or regional training centers, followed by written exams, interviews, demo lessons, and participation in intensive training programs. These programs involve close observation, mentorship, and evaluation by experienced trainers. In some cases, candidates serve as trainee trainers for up to a year, completing extensive portfolios and receiving ongoing feedback before being officially appointed. Trainer Said Al Hatmi recalled that he was appointed as a trainer after “undergoing a year as a trainee trainer

with many evaluation visits, completing a comprehensive portfolio, and presenting workshops under supervision.”

A day in the life of a SIPTT trainer often involves leading workshops and training sessions for English teachers across Oman, covering a wide range of topics. Beyond delivering training, SIPTT trainers design and develop educational courses and materials, write reports, and evaluate the impact of their programs.

The topics of the professional-development workshops often directly address or respond to common challenges Omani English teachers are facing in their classrooms. One of the most persistent issues for English teachers across Oman is teaching large, mixed-ability classes, which makes classroom management, lesson planning, and student engagement particularly complicated. Trainer Bahiya Al Dawi observed, “teachers often face the challenge of addressing diverse student abilities within a single classroom, which complicates lesson planning and the implementation of effective teaching strategies.” Trainer Nada Al Zadjali

emphasized, “the high number of students in the classroom and adapting curriculum to students’ needs are constant concerns.” Teachers also struggle with curriculum overload, having to cover dense material within a limited number of lessons. Trainers often recommend differentiated instruction strategies such as using tiered tasks and assigning roles based on students’ abilities during group work. Another effective approach involves incorporating technology to support classroom management through educational apps and interactive websites.

To build resilience in the face of these challenges, SIPTT trainers consistently advise new teachers to embrace a mindset of lifelong learning, adaptability, and student-centeredness. Trainer Mohammed Al Harasi highlighted that “new teachers need to work hard, apply strategies multiple times, and find their own teaching style.” Trainers emphasize the importance of building strong relationships with students, creating a supportive and interactive classroom environment, and adapting lessons to meet learners’ needs.

Trainer Ali Al Riyam recalled a trainee who discovered her style after realizing that many of her students were visual learners. “She started creating colorful infographics, posters, and short videos to explain grammar rules,” he said. “Not only did her students respond better, but she also realized that visual creativity was part of her identity as a teacher.” Bahia Al Dhawi advises that teachers should “always focus on [their] students’ needs and adapt [their] teaching accordingly.” Also, she encourages teachers to “keep lessons interactive and never stop learning.”

Trainers urge new teachers to stay updated with current teaching methods and technologies, read authentic research, attend English Language Teaching (ELT) conferences, and engage with professional communities. Above all, they inspire new teachers to be patient, enjoy the teaching journey, and find their own teaching style while continually striving to improve.

SIPTT trainers are also continuously learning by actively engaging in a wide range of



A SIPTT English teacher-trainer participates in a professional-development activity led by an English Language Specialist

professional-development activities. Many have completed numerous train-the-trainer (TOT) training programs and participate in specialized workshops conducted by U.S. Embassy English Language (EL) Specialists. Bahia Al Dhawi shared that participating in online and in-person professional-development “workshops facilitated by EL Specialists, designing materials for vocational college teachers, and attending online courses provided by the Udemy platform” have all contributed to her growth. In her *Effective Strategies in Teaching* course, trainer Dr. Raya Suleiman Al-Risi adapted an activity called “Line Up” that she learned from EL Specialist Riah Werner. “I gave an example classroom challenge, and trainees lined up based on how much it impacted them. Then they discussed practical solutions with those nearby. It was interactive, relevant, and helped generate ideas they could apply right away,” she said.

In addition to in-person opportunities, trainers regularly participate in online courses, covering topics such as TESOL methodologies, transformational leadership, special educational needs, and research for professional development.

SIPTT trainers use a variety of professional resources to inform and enhance their training. Frequently cited favorites include books such as *The Practice of English Language Teaching* by Jeremy Harmer and *Learning Teaching* by Jim Scrivener. Journals such as *ELT Journal*, *TESOL Quarterly*, *English Teaching Professional* magazine, and *Australian Educational Technology Journal* are valued for keeping trainers up-to-date with the latest research, trends, and best practices. Trainer Shamsa Al Rasbi commented that his “favorite resources include the British Council’s TeachingEnglish platform, *ELT Journal*, and Edutopia for practical teaching tips and strategies.”

In addition to print materials, trainers regularly turn to websites such as AmericanEnglish.state.gov, the British Council’s TeachingEnglish platform, TESOL International Association, Breaking News English, and Edutopia, which provide lesson

ideas, training materials, and classroom strategies. Trainer Ali Saleh Al Riyami explained, “I have my trainees use the American English (AE) website to find activities for their classes when they are planning lessons. The AE Teacher’s Corner has activity ideas organized by language skills such as listening, speaking, etc., so it is easy to find what they need.”

Trainer Shamsa Al Rasbi argued, “nowadays, it’s a necessity to use technology in training. I use different tools to collect information, save time, and engage trainees through interactive tasks.” SIPTT trainers consistently integrate technology and digital resources into their training sessions to enhance engagement and interactivity. They make extensive use of interactive platforms such as Kahoot!, Mentimeter, Slido, Padlet, Socrative, Nearpod, and Google Forms to facilitate quizzes, discussions, brainstorming, and real-time feedback. Trainers also leverage AI tools like ChatGPT for lesson planning, idea generation, and creating customized materials.

Trainer Ali Saleh Al Riyami shared how using the Slido website helped solve a recurring challenge during training sessions. “Trainees were often hesitant to share their opinions about educational issues during discussions,” he explained. He decided to use Slido for such discussions, which resulted in active anonymous participation, proving that tech tools can break participation barriers.

As Oman works to diversify its economy and align with Vision 2040, English proficiency has become increasingly important for academic and professional success. Vision 2040 emphasizes innovation, global engagement, and private sector growth—areas where English plays a critical role. In this response, SIPTT plays a central role in advancing English language education in Omani schools by supporting the professional development of public-school teachers through practical training, updated methodologies, and the integration of digital tools. SIPTT’s ongoing efforts—backed by the Ministry of Education



Trainers and teachers are encouraged to create visual, engaging materials

and strengthened through international partnerships—position the institute to help meet evolving educational goals and prepare both teachers and students for global opportunities. It is worth mentioning that English is used widely in Oman, especially in education, business, and industries like oil, gas, tourism, and healthcare. It is taught in all schools from primary to higher education. While Arabic is the official language, English is common in urban areas, workplaces, and public services. Its role continues to grow as Oman moves towards a more globalized, knowledge-based economy under Vision 2040.

Ali Saleh Al Riyami is a teacher-trainer at the Specialized Institute for Professional Training of Teachers and a PhD candidate at Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology. He holds a master's degree in Curriculum and Teaching Methods and specializes in professional-development research and teaching methodologies. His work focuses on designing and developing training programs to enhance teachers' skills and instructional practices.

Dr. Raya Suleiman Al-Risi is a dedicated academic and educator specializing in English language teaching, teacher training, and educational strategies. With extensive experience in teacher training, she is committed to advancing innovative teaching methods and fostering effective learning environments. Al-Risi is particularly passionate about equipping educators with practical strategies to enhance student engagement and achievement. Her work combines theory and classroom practice.

Kim Chilmonik is a Regional English Language Officer (RELO) with the U.S. Department of State's Office of English Language Programs, where she supports global outreach and education initiatives. Chilmonik most recently served as RELO Manama, supporting Oman and the broader Gulf region.