A Case Study into the impact of Exam Based Classes on students' English Language
proficiency in Secondary Technical Schools and Vocational Education Development Centre
in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This study investigates the most effective type of English classes for Vocational Education Development Centre and Secondary Technical School students in the United Arab Emirates. Exam based classes, in comparison to general English classes, can be the answer to the laid back attitude of students in the two institutes because they may urge students to make more effort to learn. Exam anxiety can be used as a motivational instrument in exam classes. When long enough, exam classes develop English language proficiency in addition to developing the exam taking techniques. It can be considered that setting clear standards for the different phases of the English language learning programme, designing appropriate syllabus, adopting convenient teaching materials and preparing students to pass a skills based exam are all the components that make exam classes effective for the context of the two institutes. Data were gathered from questionnaires, interviews and observations using the triangulation approach to verify the accuracy of the collected data. The project concludes that exam based classes that prepare students for skills based exams and that practice exam format are the most effective strategy for Vocational Education Development Centre and Secondary Technical School students to feel more responsible and take initiatives towards advancing their English language skills.

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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Recently, exam preparation classes have become more popular for the fact that exams have become more important in deciding whether one can be accepted in a study programme, enrol for a university, obtain a scholarship, get a job, keep a job to name a few. There are a lot of dreams of man's life that are conditioned by reaching certain standards which are decided by exams whether formal or informal, written or oral, direct or indirect, intended or unintended. Hence, passing exams is a vital part in man's life. To pass an exam, one needs to be prepared in two aspects. The first and the most important is the content in which the candidate will be tested while the second is the format and the lay-out of the exam. To start with the latter, candidates feel more confident to take the exam if they are familiar with the exam format and lay-out. On the other hand, candidates should prepare themselves for exam content through courses that aim at achieving certain learning objectives. This research explores the effectiveness of exam based classes in developing learners' English abilities in comparison to general English classes trying to highlight the points of strength and weakness which may affect the way English learning programmes are designed. This study is personalised to Vocational Education Development Centre (VEDC) and Secondary Technical School (STS) students. VEDC and STS are two vocational training institutes that are based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and that promote Emiratisation (replacing foreign workforce with UAE nationals). The outcomes of this research can be drawn to similar institutes with similar philosophies and conditions. A mix between the two types of classes to be able to bring more strength into English classes and avoid more weaknesses may be the outcome of this research.

Exam preparation classes are the classes that are entirely devoted to preparing learners to pass a specific exam (May 1996). Exam classes managed to make a real difference in the success of VEDC and STS to the extent that the two institutes were the nucleus of establishing a stand-alone body concerned with vocational education in the emirate of Abu Dhabi called the Abu Dhabi Centre of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ACTVET). ACTVET is meant to be the counterpart of Abu Dhabi Educational Council (ADEC) that is concerned with main stream education. ACTVET aims at encouraging more Emirati students

to take the path of vocational and technical education to provide the business market with skilled UAE nationals. The business market is in need for local manpower that works in the field rather than behind their desks. The main focus of this research is VEDC students rather than STS's. This is because STS is just one year old and it is considered an extension to all the practices in VEDC that was established in 2003. Although VEDC is established for disengaged students from main stream education while STS receive regular students from grade nine, the two projects share the same flavour of both the type of vocational and technical education and the type of learners who are mostly kinaesthetic. This latter one will be discussed in detail.

1.2 Problem

Almost all job candidates for teaching positions in STS and VEDC mention that lack of students' motivation is one of the biggest challenges they face with their classes in the gulf region in general and in the UAE in specific. The drive to learn is at risk although the drive to succeed and promote to the following year strongly exists. Students at state schools take promotion to the following year for granted. It seems that it is almost guaranteed as long as students show up and take the test. Only 45 per cent of STS new candidates managed to pass 2012/2013 STS entry tests in English and Math (Appendix E). The two entry tests are aligned with the learning outcomes of grades eight and nine of main stream education. This poor result of STS entry tests indicates that many of the students who are promoted have not achieved the learning outcomes at least of the two years in the two subjects. If the policy is to promote students whether they are 'authentically' successful or not, is not the focus of this research. Why do students need to make effort to learn if promotion to the following year is guaranteed? Students come to both VEDC and STS with this culture. STS and VEDC have clear strict assessment plans that are based on clear cut standards (Appendix D). This has raised the institutes profile since it does not compromise promoting students if they do not achieve the required standards.

 Parents have lost faith in the quality of education their children are receiving in state schools. This loss of faith in the current educational system promotes for STS since they are new projects that work hard to avoid the shortcomings of all existing practices. Employment and improving English language and IT skills are the main points of strength that advantage STS

over many other educational institutes in the UAE. This is in addition to providing students with a better option than the literary stream that over 70 per cent of general education high school students decide to join. The majority of UAE students prefer the literary stream to the scientific to avoid studying Mathematics, Chemistry and Physics which are not their favourite subjects. Although technical and vocational education has been looked at as an inferior type of education, the poor quality of general education has reflected positively on the interest of parents and students to join STS. Also, one of the most important factors that promotes STS and VEDC as well is the project based learning as opposed to rote learning and the traditional way of leaning that is based on theory and lecturing which does not appeal to most of the UAE students' style of learning. This point will be further explained later in the paper.

1.3 Proposed Answer

 Zureik (2005) points out that lack of motivation to learn has been an issue for a great number of UAE students. The welfare of life in the gulf region and the promotion from one grade to another that is taken for granted have contributed largely to this issue. Therefore, the need for a drive to make effort to learn has emerged strongly to put an end to this laid back attitude towards learning. In VEDC and STS, exam based classes can be the drive that pushes students to make efforts to learn because exam classes clearly visualise defined goals for students to achieve. Implementing the pass/fail policy in VEDC and STS was because of adopting exam preparation classes. It is important to mention that these exam preparation classes are based on Cambridge ESOL examinations. Having external international exam influences all internal evaluation and assessment practices. In other words, the credibility of internal STS and VEDC assessment would be questioned if students fail the external international exam and pass the internal. The role of the external international exams of Cambridge ESOL is to validate STS and VEDC evaluation practices as a quality assurance measure. These together, alongside with some other factors that will be discussed later in this research, managed to make a dramatic change in the learning environment in both VEDC and STS.

In VEDC, students do not have the motive to work hard to learn English in general English classes. They need a motive to do it. Setting standards and benchmarks for each phase that is connected to passing an international exam of Cambridge ESOL's managed to push students

to make effort. Students feel that they are under external pressure that decides their promotion to the following stage. This strategy changed the educational atmosphere in VEDC altogether and was an effective and recommended strategy for STS to implement.

If exam preparation classes are proved throughout this research that they are effective in this context, then they can be a good model for other institutes with similar background to adopt this strategy to guarantee a successful English learning programme saving the time of trial and error that is on the account of students' interest and the institute's reputation.

1.4 Research Guidelines

Based on VEDC students' background, VEDC curriculum strategies and VEDC industry partnership, this study investigates the effectiveness of exam preparation classes in developing students' English language skills. This is through a qualitative research approach using VEDC and STS as case studies. The research tools include two questionnaires for students and teachers (Appendices A and B), interviews with students, teachers and the business unit coordinator (Appendix C) and observations. Triangulation (Bell 2005) is used to validate the data collected and to look at the study from different perspectives. The figure below depicts what triangulation is. Further explanations will be given in the following chapter.
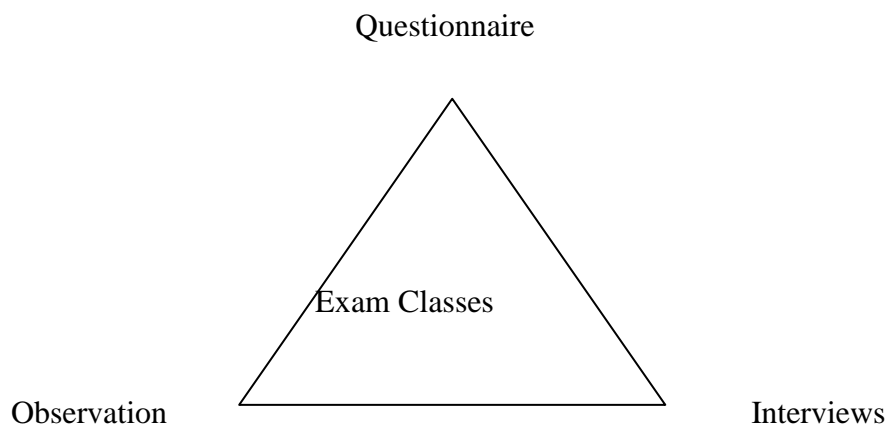
Questionnaire

Exam Classes

Observation   Interviews

Figure 1 explains triangulation in this research

1.5 VEDC Profile

VEDC is a special project that is established for disengaged students from the main stream education. The aim is to bring these students back to classrooms, give them vocational training and offer them a job at the level of operators and technicians. At the early stage of VEDC, the management thought that it is enough for students to be UAE nationals to guarantee them a job by the graduation. This assumption turned out to be absolutely wrong because the industry partners who are interested in VEDC students were not satisfied with the quality of the first group of VEDC graduates. The expectations from VEDC industry partners were far higher than the quality of education that VEDC is offering. It is true that VEDC industry partners are interested in employing VEDC students to meet the target of Emiratisation ratio of their workforce but it is true also that they need reasonably qualified personnel to help them run a successful business. Industry partners do not need passengers; they need active and qualified local workforce. Hence, there was a real need for VEDC to review its strategies to offer good education and to graduate students with satisfying skills to the industry partners. The changes in curriculum strategies were important and so was the change in students mind sets who believed that jobs are guaranteed only because they are Emiratis.

The following table is SWOT analysis on VEDC:

Positive		Negative
	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal Factors	- Unique project in the region - Monthly stipend - Vocational Skills - Supports Emiratisation Policy - Business market reluctant to receive low standards	- Students Lack of motivation - Students lack of life skills - The success of this project may encourage more mainstream education drop out to take this short cut to employment
External Factors	Opportunities	Threats
	- Employment - New branches in other gulf countries - Similar projects for girls	- Discrepancies in philosophies - Expatriates fight back for fear of losing jobs - Career Development Department tried to

	- Change in the mentality of society regarding the importance of Vocational Education.	satisfy the industry partners by giving far-fetching promises which raised the industry partners expectations and this fires back on the STS/VEDC credibility

Table 1 VEDC/STS SWOT Analysis

English is the medium language in all businesses and it comes first on the list of priorities of STS/VEDC industry partners. In other words, STS/VEDC do not receive any feedback on any of the other skills with which STS/VEDC is keen to equip our students. Only English is the focus of the industry partners since it is the immediate skill that is needed once our students report to their work placement. All other vocational skills are in their capacity by organising on-site and in-house training programmes. Of all the skills STS/VEDC is teaching, only English captures the focus of industry partners. Surprisingly and fortunately the industry partners have not expressed any interest in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Initially, VEDC believed that this type of English would be the type of language industry partners to request since apprentices need to know the names of the tools in the workshop in English for instance. It is also fortunate that industry partners did not ask for ESP since VEDC receives academically low ability students the thing that makes teaching ESP an inconvenient option. Teaching ESP usually comes after laying the foundations of general English which requires extended learning programmes. ESP can be ideally introduced after elementary level which is the exit point of VEDC students and the beginning of the second year for STS students (CEFR A2). ESP is still an option that is going to be discussed with STS industry partners since STS students' English abilities are higher than VEDC students'.

 VEDC run a three-year programme which is not long enough to lay the foundations of English skills and then move forward towards teaching ESP. What makes it even more difficult to reach that phase in three years' time is students' lack of motivation to learn which affects their performance negatively. There are many reasons that do not encourage students to make real effort to learn; one of which is the financial support given by the government represented in 2000 UAE Dirham monthly stipend. This is in addition to the lack of academic culture. STS/VEDC western teachers do not expect having students at this low level of academic commitment after at least six years (for VEDC) of formal education and nine years

for STS. For Example, students expect their teachers to provide them with the stationery and keep portfolios organised for them. They also believe that a student's failure is the teacher's responsibility. This kind of attitude is unbelievable and reflects how spoiled students are in state schools. It also reflects the quality of education offered since education is not teaching academic subjects only. Education is raising up good citizens equipped with the required skills to be active members in the community.

VEDC programmes target underachievers who were unable to complete their state school programmes or acquire the skills they were expected to learn from a normal classroom environment because they are socially, culturally or academically 'challenged'. VEDC is established to be a second chance for students who do not fit in the regular classroom. VEDC is getting the same results the state Schools become infamous for and for the same reason which is students' lack of motivation. At the initial stage, VEDC did not have rigid plans to address the learning needs of a population that cannot adapt to a 'normal' classroom situation. VEDC is established to be an 'alternative' to a traditional education programme. Students who have discipline and behaviour problems are considered for admission unlike similar projects in the west. At least 85 per cent of VEDC students have learning challenges that require a specialized environment of instruction and training.

A VEDC student is between 14 and 22 years old. Usually, his parents offer no guidance and are unaware that their children are almost disconnected from their history, culture and religion. Youth such as these are being raised by their peers. Many students see the time spent at VEDC as an easy way to make 2,000 UAE Dirham a month (stipend received from VEDC) by just showing up.

VEDC's mission is to take Emirati youths who underachieved/failed at school and/or who have difficulties in their personal lives and to develop their characters and give them life and vocational skills so that they have a better chance of being successful in the workplace and life in general.

VEDC can achieve its goals if it manages to motivate and inspire students. This requires not only education, but also teaching students to value and believe in the qualities industry looks for. It is effective when the students are able to experience these values, beliefs and behaviour or positive qualities in their daily lives. This can be obtained through establishing a

curriculum strategy that addresses students' needs as well as industry partners' requirements. A curriculum puts the right students, in the right class, with the right books, doing the right courses. An English curriculum for VEDC has a single simple purpose: to work out exactly what English students need, and then how exactly to provide them with it .The curriculum clearly lays out the plan to successfully achieve the outcomes of the English programme as required by VEDC's industry partners. One year after establishing VEDC, it was obvious that it is not important to implement what we, the educationalists, believe needs to be achieved, but what matters is to achieve and satisfy the industry partners needs. Otherwise, VEDC is graduating unneeded 'product' that is to join the long queue of unemployment amongst UAE nationals.

 A curriculum is written by specifying the English skills to teach, the English outcomes to achieve, the books and materials to use to teach those skills and to deliver those outcomes. It also specifies the test and evaluation procedures to make sure that progress is maintained during the programme, and that the desired outcomes are successfully achieved when the programme ends. When writing a curriculum, these factors are taken into account to cut cloth according to the measure. Careful calculations are made based on the time, the students, the resources and the staff. Having realistic and reachable set of exit requirements, enough class time, enough resources, experienced teachers, motivated students, then reaching the outcomes can be achievable. A curriculum is a strategic plan; one of the tactics which make it work is the sequence of individual courses of which the programme is composed, and the sequence of learning outcomes which form these courses. The curriculum defines what needs to be taught, the teaching material to be used to teach it, and the sequence of these courses. This means working out a series of courses, taking the student step-by-step from entry to exit; each course follows the previous one, and prepares for the following one. A student at each level needs to be in a course at their level. If they are misplaced, they learn nothing because either it is already known to them or it is too difficult. A students needs to be in a class at their level, otherwise they do not learn anything.

As a following step to deciding the VEDC curriculum, designing the syllabus that serves the curriculum strategy is crucial for the success of VEDC. Investigations were carried out to decide on the best type of syllabus to adopt in VEDC that serves the standards set for each year till the graduation. VEDC syllabus is based on Common European Framework of

Reference (CEFR) standards and Cambridge ESOL exams that tell whether standards are achieved for each stage. The selected textbook serves tightly to achieve the standards of each phase through student centred activities as well as task based and project based learning for the nature of VEDC students. The focus is to develop students' English language skills to qualify them for real involvement into workplace. VEDC internal assessment is only one of the tools to tell whether students achieve the standards of a specific phase. However, Cambridge ESOL examinations are the external assessment tools that VEDC resorts to to verify reaching the standards of a whole specific academic year. VEDC internal assessment emphasises the skills based assessment rather than knowledge based. However, there is a need to resort to Cambridge ESOL for two reasons: VEDC's industry partners do not trust internal evaluation practices as much they do when it is compared to an international exam under international standards of testing conditions; VEDC has not reached yet the level of maturity that stops compromising the quality of graduates. Also, the reputation of inaccurate evaluation in state schools contributes to this mistrust. The second reason relates to the importance of having a well-known international certificate that proves reaching certain international standards. VEDC industry partners are not expected nor obliged to study VEDC curriculum strategy to be able to understand VEDC standards. As an end user, they are concerned with the final outcomes that can be easily perceived in the form of a University of Cambridge Certificate that indicates clearly the standards VEDC students manage to achieve in correlation to International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which is well known to them. Although Key English Test (KET) was not known at the beginning to VEDC industry partners, it was easy to explain the standards using IELTS scale which is well known in the business market as much it is in the academic institutes. It becomes common for any post secondary education and any business to set their English language criterion by requesting a certain score in IELTS which ranges from 4.5 to 7.0 band score whether Academic or General Training (the two types of IELTS).

Because the whole curriculum strategy (as an overall umbrella to all other policies and practices including syllabus design, adopting a textbook and standards based approach) is based on CEFR standards and the corresponding Cambridge ESOL examinations, it may be a wise act to adopt the exam preparation classes rather than general English classes in this context. Exam preparation classes can be the answer for the issue of students' lack of motivation since they put more pressure on students to make an effort to pass an external

exam of University of Cambridge with all its prestigious connotations in the UAE community. The pass mark for KET and Preliminary English Test (PET) is 70 per cent (Appendix E); the thing that adds to the pressure to work harder. Moreover, since Cambridge ESOL examinations are not knowledge based exams, it is crucial for the learner to develop their skills to pass. Passing Cambridge ESOL examinations is not a matter of knowing about the English language but knowing the language itself with all its major skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. This is because Cambridge ESOL exams are communicative exams since they test the four skills of the language in an everyday language context. This explains the reason why many universities and workplaces require a certain score of IELTS to guarantee that the candidate has the required English language skills not the knowledge about the language.

For VEDC students, the curriculum is designed to achieve the standards of Young Learners English test (YLE) Starters and Movers before KET while in STS the standards of KET and PET are the two steps before achieving the graduation standards of STS which is band score 4.5 IELTS Academic(Figure 2). This approach of breaking a long journey down into shorter phases with milestones is crucial. One of the big mistakes of exam based classes is having unrealistic expectations of scoring high in a test like IELTS while the actual English abilities are not as high. This usually results in frustration for learners who never achieve the required score. KET and PET are two realistic introductory steps to take before being exposed to the challenge of IELTS. KET and PET are seen as two stepping stones towards IELTS. The table below demonstrates the different standards required for both VEDC and STS indicating the assessment tool used from Cambridge ESOL examinations.

Year/Project	VEDC	STS
Year 1	YLE STARTERS (PRE A1 OF CEFR)	KET (A2 OF CEFR)
Year 2	YLE MOVERS (A1 OF CEFR)	PET (B1 OF CEFR)
Year 3	KET (A2 OF CEFR)	IELTS 4.5 ACADEMIC

Table 3 VEDC and STS standards and exams (see Figure 2)

1.6 Summary

This chapter demonstrates the problem that UAE students face with their English classes. Since it is noticed that with more effort students' English proficiency can be developed, there is a need to adopt an English learning programme that can help students make more effort to develop their English skills. Exam based classes are thought to be the answer for this problem. This research is an investigation into the effectiveness of exam preparation classes in developing VEDC and STS students' English language abilities in comparison to general English classes. The following Chapter will present the literature review on exam based classes and clearly state the research questions of this study.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This chapter presents the literature review of exam based classes alongside with some related areas: a number of theoretical frameworks of language learning,   the type of exams that exam classes are based on in the light of Common European Framework of References (CEFR) and standards based curriculum, designing the syllabus that best cater for the institute's needs and adopting a general English textbook that supports the curriculum and syllabus. This chapter is concerned with presenting the relevant literature review in all these previously mentioned areas while the following chapters are concerned with the methods of investigation, results' analysis, discussions and finally the recommendations that can be considered for any future practices in a similar context to STS/ VEDC.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Language Learning

This section presents some theoretical framework of language learning to facilitate understanding how children acquire/learn a language. This understanding should help adopt the effective approach for teaching languages. Exam preparation classes may have some of each framework.

 Chomsky (1965) points out that human beings are born with a special device that helps them acquire not just their first language but also any other human language. He explains that children learn their first language through what he calls Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Chomsky (1965) named this approach 'Innatist or Nativist' which explains how children acquire languages. It also gives explanation to children's errors and any other unique utterances they produce. LAD explains children's creativity. For example, children's overgeneralization supports this approach. Children are believed to consider all verbs as regular till they learn the irregular. They can produce utterances like 'He swimmed yesterday'. Chomsky believes that LAD is the machine that is concerned with grasping the language, processing it and producing utterances with some input from the individual.

Behaviourism is another approach by Skinner (1969), the American psychologist, who believes that environment shapes children's lives including language which is a set of habits.

Children acquire the language habits from the environment like any other habits they acquire. This can be true to a great extent. However, this approach does not explain the unique utterances that children produce which they are never taught. Children must have some individual touch on the language acquired from the environment.

A third theoretical framework of language learning is Vygotsky's Zone of Proximate Development (ZPD) which is a set of skills and knowledge that the learner is ready to reach with some assistance. ZPD is the difference between what a learner cannot do alone and what they can do with the help of more abled peer or an adult. Vygotsky emphasizes the role of society in learning a language. Vygotsky (1978) points out that 'scaffolding' enhances learners' abilities and helps them do the task themselves later on without any assistance. Language scaffolding is very similar to the help we give to babies while learning how to walk. Here comes the role of society in language learning.

2.2 Cambridge ESOL Examinations and CEFR

As explained in the official website of the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (http://www.cambridgeesol.org/about/standards/cefr.html),   CEFR   is   international benchmarks that describe the language abilities of learners at different levels from lowest to highest as follows: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 Figure 2). Also, they are mapped to international English tests such as International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). The following two figures from Cambridge ESOL website present all CEFR levels against the international English Exams offered by the University of Cambridge English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).
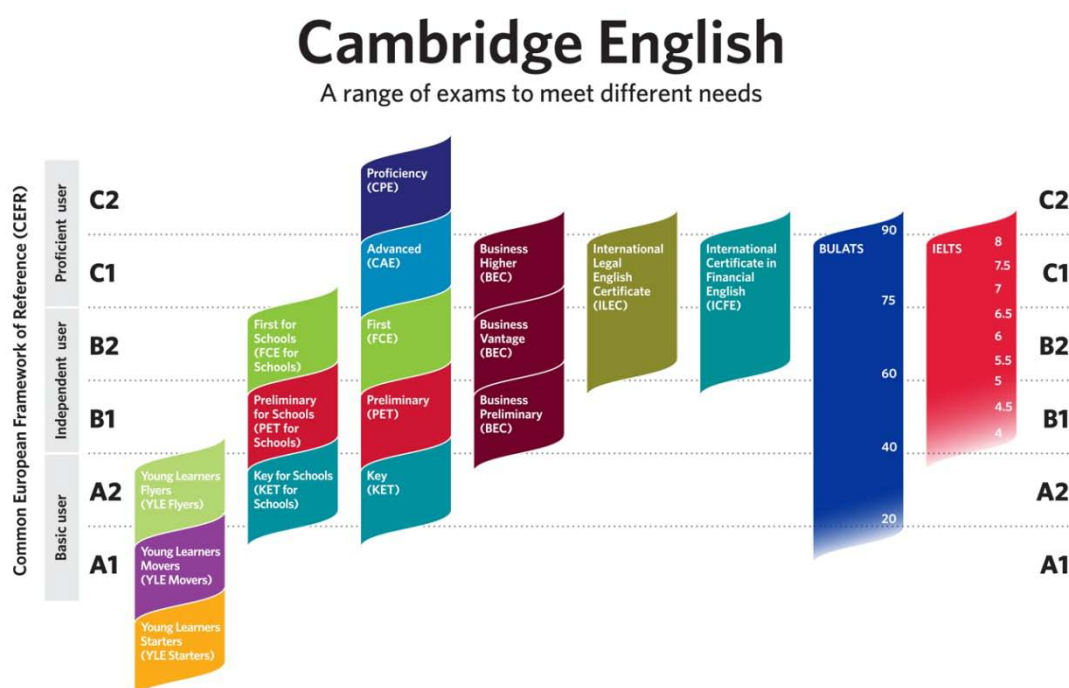
Figure 2 CEFR and Cambridge ESOL Exams

(http://www.cambridgeesol.org/about/standards/cefr.html)

It is important to draw the attention to IELTS correlations to CEFR levels. As seen in the chart (red-faded colour), IELTS is not a good assessment tool for those whose language abilities are below B1 (IELTS 4.0). Therefore it is highly recommended for them not to take IELTS exam before they reach B1 of CEFR. Those learners at levels A1 and A2 can be better evaluated by Key English Test (KET) or Preliminary English Test (PET) as appropriate instead. Rushing to take the IELTS test at these lower levels causes frustrations that usually hinder English learning progress.

Teachers who work for the Ministry of Education in the UAE are required to achieve band 6.0 IELTS to be able to keep their jobs. They usually enrol in exam based classes. Most of them become disappointed because they take the exam many times and feel that it becomes a complex. Since IELTS tests the language skills, it is unreasonable to expect to achieve the required band score without working on developing the language skills. Some learners believe that it is a matter of knowing about the exam lay-out and exam taking techniques only. It is very important to have a good plan for them to reach the required score as it is a serious matter of losing a job with all its consequences. Using KET and/or PET as two

stepping stones to achieve the 4.5 – 5.0 band score in IELTS is the answer to this dilemma. Beginner and elementary level students should not be exposed to IELTS at this early stage for fear of demoralising them (Figure 3).

Recently, it has become a trend for international publishing houses like Cambridge University Press (CUP) and Oxford University Press (OUP) to state clearly on the cover page of their publications of English textbooks the level of CEFR; this is to facilitate selecting the right teaching material to the right level of learners. In line with this, the teaching materials that are adopted for STS/VEDC are aligned with CEFR as well. VEDC uses a textbook called Ventures of CUP that consists of 5 levels which are all aligned with CEFR levels. For example, students study the basic level which is pre A1 of CEFR (Literacy Level) in their first year in VEDC. The exam used for this level is the Young Learners English Test (YLE) Starters. Successful students move to the second year and study (Level one) which is parallel to A1 of CEFR. YLE Movers is used to ensure that students achieved the standards of the second year. Key English Test (KET) is the international exam that validates that students achieved the standards of Level two which is parallel to A2 of CEFR. A2 has been set to be the graduation benchmark for VEDC students based on the analysis conducted that is based on students' abilities and the business market needs (Figure 2). This level was found to be the minimum level that satisfies VEDC industry partners. Although some VEDC industry partners ask for B1 of CEFR, A2 is satisfying for most of the current demand.
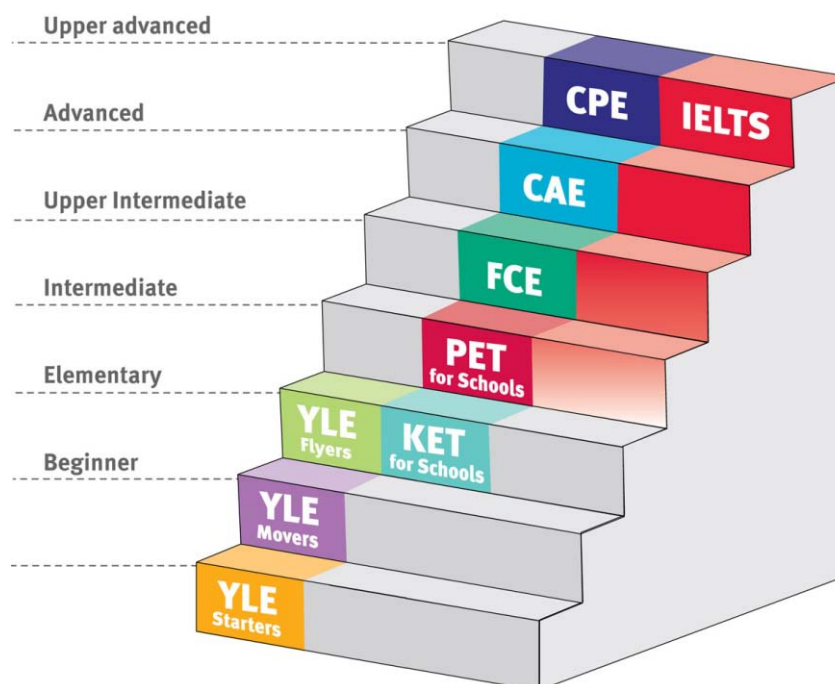
Figure 3 Cambridge ESOL Exams and English Levels
(http://www.cambridgeesol.org/about/standards/cefr.html)

For STS, the benchmarks are higher. Students study English Unlimited textbppk of CUP which is mapped to CEFR as well. They take KET (A2) and PET (B1) for the first two years before they achieve the graduation benchmark of IELTS 4.5. As mentioned before, students should not be exposed to IELTS before they reach level B1 of CEFR. This is the reason behind adopting KET and PET for the first two years.

2.3 Syllabus Design

This section discusses how designing the suitable syllabus can help the effectiveness of exam based classes. This point in specific along with selecting the right general English textbook may prove that exam based classes are not just preparing learners for passing a specific exam by giving the exam techniques and familiarizing them with the exam lay-out. Effective exam based classes embrace designing the appropriate syllabus and selecting the suitable textbook which mean that there is heavy work to do on developing learners' English skills. Effective exam based classes is not familiarising students with exam format only.

  The Needs Analyses that were conducted in VEDC and STS indicate that most of the STS/VEDC students are categorised as kinaesthetic type of learners. They learn better by doing rather than hearing or seeing. Learners are a mix of different learning styles with only a

dominant one. Fleming's VARK Model (1987) explains the different learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Reading & Writing and Kinaesthetic or Tactile. The STS/VEDC students tend to enjoy hands-on activities and project based learning.

Initially, VEDC believed that syllabus is the same like curriculum which is in error. There is some confusion in defining syllabus and curriculum which makes the vision of some educational institutes blur. Deciding on the curriculum and then adopting the syllabus that serves the philosophies and policies are the logical steps toward an effective English learning programme. Confusing syllabus with curriculum makes the textbook authors decide the path that an institute takes which does not help it to reach its goals. Curriculum is the umbrella that covers the general goal of language teaching/learning, students' needs, any other concerned parties needs, tasks and activities, assessment and evaluation, resources and facilities. In other words, a curriculum is a whole educational process with all its subdivisions and subcomponents (Candlin 1984). Allen (1984) states that curriculum is the philosophical , social and administrative factors which draw the broad guidelines for a whole educational programme while syllabus is the subpart of curriculum that is concerned with content and methodology. Nunan (1988) refers to the different views of syllabus design that sometimes put content and methodology together which is called a broad approach of syllabus design while some other times put clear distinctions and separate them altogether (narrow approach). Methodology is meant here to be the tasks and activities that students carry out to achieve the learning objectives (Nunan 1988).

 Skills for Life of CUP which is just a textbook was viewed as a curriculum by VEDC. Since the early philosophy of VEDC was just to 'contain' the disengaged students and offer them basic vocational and academic skills at the literacy level, Skills for life was suitable. However, it is a textbook that is designed for immigrants to the United Kingdom who have no English language skills and who are living in an English-speaking environment. It is English as a Second Language (ESL) course rather than English as a Foreign Language (EFL) one. The difference between ESL and EFL is that the former involves the outside-class activities where students have the opportunity to practice what they learn in their daily life while the latter gets very little support from the outside-class environment where English is hardly spoken. It is obvious that Skills for Life is a tool to serve totally different needs from the needs and requirements under discussions. Skills for Life was viewed in the VEDC like a

curriculum rather than just a textbook which is an error that many educational institutes commit when they let the textbook take the lead and influence their philosophies and policies. In addition, the environment in the UAE is totally different in the sense that it is a non-English speaking environment and students have neither the instrumental nor the integrative motivation that makes them put effort to learn (Lambert & Gardner 1972). It took VEDC time to enable students to see the need to learn English, to mingle with the English speaking community and to get a job. Most of VEDC students are nomads who hardly mix with others with different cultures. In the beginning phase students did not see a good reason to make an effort to learn since they were under the impression that all they needed to do is to spend sometime in VEDC before they get a job from industry partners who are in need of young Emirati technicians and operators to comply with the general policy of Emiratisation. Students were astute enough to recognise this and understand that it is only a matter of time before they get a job. Skills for Life did not have any potential to get students involved simply because it was not designed to address the Emirati students' needs nor the current situation of the VEDC. Moreover, it does not consider students learning style nor the non-English speaking environment that students are living in. In other words Skills for Life is designed to cater to totally different purposes and customers that relate to the United Kingdom immigrants context.

Having the students' needs, industry partners' needs in addition to the learning styles of the VEDC/STS students explored, it is essential to shed some light on the different types of syllabi to be able to adopt and design the one that best suits the needs of the case in hand.

Dubin and Olshtain (1986) explain that there are different kinds of syllabus format: the linear, the cyclical, the matrix, the story-line and the modular format. The linear format is convenient for a syllabus with structure and grammar focus. It starts with simple concepts and builds up as the syllabus progresses and matures. Students who follow this type of syllabus enjoy high level of structure awareness but low listening and speaking skills. The linear type supports knowing about the language more than knowing and practising the language itself.

The cyclical format has the same themes and presents the same concepts gradually. For instance, the present simple tense can be introduced in unit one of level one to express routines and again in a cycle in unit one of level two but with a higher approach like using the

present simple to express future events. The advantages of this type are to keep students in the themes that deal with their needs and subtly upgrade their language skills gradually.

The modular format is very flexible regarding the material to be used. It is better suited for situational language and is a file cabinet type of material rather than a textbook style.

The matrix format does not emphasise following the plan as it appears in order. In a matrix format, teachers can start anywhere in the study plan. It is a flexible format that gives teachers and students opportunities to start where appropriate. Such format enhances the experiential approach of language learning since it aims at exposing students to the language and does not guarantee what can be learnt on the journey.

The story-line format represents the notional and functional language in a very coherent style. It becomes very obvious to students that they acquire the language concepts through a story that captures their attention while the subconscious absorbs language concepts.

 VEDC and STS decide to follow the cyclical format since it is noticed that themes that appeal to students help them become more involved. The cyclical format keeps and follows a limited number of themes that are very common in daily life. Besides, because of the pressures that industry partners are putting on the VEDC to produce better quality apprentices with good English skills, VEDC has decided to set KET (Cambridge ESOL Examination) as the graduation benchmark. KET themes target everyday life situations as well. The cyclical format has all potential that serves the VEDC to meet all its challenges.

 Along with the cyclical format, process-oriented approach of syllabus design is the one that suits the VEDC students. Reilly (1988) states that there are two approaches for syllabus design. They are product-oriented and process-oriented. The former emphasises the content while the latter gives more attention to the activities and experiences students acquire throughout the programme. It has been very clear to VEDC/STS that process-oriented approach in syllabus design suits students best since it highlights the involvement of students and adopts task-based, project-based and learner-led approaches which match VEDC students' style of learning.

2.4 Textbook

Adopting a textbook is controversial because it combines many variables (teachers, learners, publishers, the market needs in addition to finance). Those who support the use of textbooks have plenty of evidence to provide to support their claim. The opposite is true as well (Ur 1991). Educational institutes may use textbooks to help learners learn a language. Therefore, it is a cornerstone in second or foreign language learning and teaching. Textbooks cater for the curriculum which in turn caters for the learners' needs on the micro level and the industry partners' requirements and the UAE strategies on the macro level.

Textbooks are of great value to teachers as well as to learners. Ur (1991) explains that textbooks help have a structured framework as they provide an overall view of the whole programme. Unlike generating materials upon the need, textbooks consider the sequence of language learning concepts and organise them in a logical order that starts from the simple to the complex (Harmer 1991 cited in Richards 1998).

Ur (1991) refers to the fact that a learner without a textbook is more teacher-dependant. Textbooks allow learners to work ahead and take learning initiatives. Also, textbooks help learners to follow their own pace of learning which helps them achieve more progress in less time. Also, they help teachers have material available to attend to some individual differences amongst learners--differentiation. Teachers are more appreciative of having textbooks especially in large classes due to the wide scope of individual differences. Textbooks work as the reference level that help teachers generate more challenging material for the high achievers and less challenging for the low achievers. In addition, teachers need to generate some material to rectify the information gaps and the different learning styles. Although it might be thought that having a textbook will not give teachers enough room to generate their own material, teachers are still in need to do so to attend to specific needs of their students.

Textbooks may help lessen the load of preparation and give teachers the opportunity to supplement according to the needs of the learners. In addition, textbooks may allow teachers to fine tune the material they have rather than starting them from scratch. Teachers have a lot of things to do with the learners to name few: manage their classrooms, prepare lessons, think methodology, motivate students, learn the names, keep accurate records of the learners' progress, analyse learners' performance and identify the points of strengths to reinforce and

the points of weaknesses to rectify. Therefore, loading the teachers with generating the teaching materials does not give them enough room to pay enough attention to other responsibilities. Professional syllabus designers and curriculum writers work in teams and base the material they generate on empirical studies and wide spectrum of research (Richards 1998). They also enjoy good budgets that make it difficult for teachers to generate as much magazine-like attractive material.

From a different perspective, textbooks can be argued to take teachers' responsibilities and leave them with a very minor role to play. Teachers turn to be just presenters of the materials that are previously designed and decided for them. Having a textbook may be seen notorious as it has the implications that teachers are incompetent to generate the right materials (Crawford 1995 cited in Richards 1998). Teachers' abilities to design and generate materials are being questioned by doing the job for them.

Also, textbooks are said to be the syllabus and the curriculum since teachers are believed to be playing a passive role in being critical to the materials they receive to teach. Nunan (1998) warns that in some institutes, textbooks replace the syllabus. Textbook authors cannot be the best people to decide for institutes the syllabus while they are not aware of their learners' needs. Moreover, it is believed that teachers become slaves to textbooks and are not allowed to interfere to have a say in what comes first and what comes last or what is teachable and what is not. In other words, textbooks can exploit teachers and deskill them according to the theory of lack of use leads to loss (Apple and Jungck 1990; Shannon 1987 cited in Richards 1998). As a result of having a textbook, teachers are not involved any more in generating materials or thinking about the needs of the learners. They just follow what they are given to teach. Textbooks cannot address the needs of learners because they are not designed for specific group of learners, unlike the materials generated by the teachers who know better the needs of their students and who design the materials that can target the areas of weaknesses and reinforce the areas of strength. In other words, the materials designed by teachers are customised to meet the needs of the learners. This is more likely to achieve better learning results (Swan 1992 cited in Richards 1998). This point can be argued because in some rural and remote areas, which usually have inexperienced teachers, having a syllabus in the form of a textbook is a plus. A textbook provides the learning and teaching context the touch of the expert that is too hard to compete with in this context.

2.5 Exam Classes

Burgess et al (2004) explains that general language classes are believed to focus on developing language skills while exam based classes help with exam taking techniques rather than any other aspect of language proficiency. Those who are after passing a certain exam enrol in exam preparation courses. On the other hand, general language classes are preferred for better language proficiency. This belief is refuted. Exam based classes are similar to general English classes if teachers have enough time before the exam. An exam preparation course of 120 hours is long enough for teachers to work on developing the English language skills as well as lexis and grammar. Yet, they are totally different in case of lack of time that makes exam classes entirely devoted to exam techniques. There is no any opportunity for exam classes to develop the English skills when learners join the course just few weeks before the date of taking the exam. Exam taking techniques is the answer to such situation then. For example, one of the useful tips that learners can get benefit from is sticking to only one position of distracters. A learner who chooses 'C' in a forty-item multiple choice test is more likely to obtain ten items correct.

 Burgess and Head (2004) summarise the differences between general English classes and exam based classes in some useful points which are presented as follows:

The first is the trap that teachers and students are more likely to fall in if they focus on exam preparation only. Students are more reluctant to work on developing their English skills in exam based classes. Students believe that practice tests are the way to pass the test. This can be true if there is no much time in hand to develop the language skills before the test. Teachers should encourage students to develop their English language skills to be able to pass Cambridge ESOL examinations which are skills based exams. Knowledge based exams do not require much time to pass since it is based on memorising more that acquiring a skill.

The second point that should have been dealt with clearly is the type of test/exam that exam classes are preparing for. This point is closely related to the first one. If exam classes are targeting a good exam like Cambridge ESOL Examinations, then the first concern is addressed automatically because such exams test the four skills of the language. However, there is a concern that there is no language test that tests the language skills only. Language exams usually test, intentionally or unintentionally, reasoning skills, speed and general

information concepts. Although they are not basic language skills, they affect the final evaluation of learner's language abilities. I do not argue that such sub skills show in the learner's language abilities but because they are not basic skills so a good exam is the one that minimises testing sub-skills and maximises testing the basic skills.

The third point is the administrative role of teachers in exam based classes in relation to the rapport that the teacher of exam classes could generate with students. Teachers of exam based classes are not only responsible for teaching the subject matter but also the authoritative body that provide students with all exam information in addition to registering the students and preparing them to the exam in the exam day. Moreover, teachers of exam classes should know why their students take the exam. This means that there is fertile land for teachers to develop their relations and build trust with students since they are involved in some other duties that have the personal touch.

The fourth point is the type of teacher that is required for exam classes. Burgess et al (2004) point out that exam classes require a teacher who is extra organised and prefers to work towards clearly defined goals. Exam based classes are well structured with clearly defined goals.

The fifth point is the suggestion of the author to give a writing task for the first homework in exam based classes. Writing is the most challenging skill of all language skills because it incorporates many other sub skills such as spelling, punctuation, syntax and structure. Along with speaking, writing is a productive skill which requires some more extra efforts than receptive ones (listening and reading). Postponing giving a challenging task first meeting with students definitely fosters their confidence which is really needed to face the challenges exam based classes have which do not usually exist in general English classes. Giving a simple reading task would be a better start to avoid raising the level of tense and anxiety at this early stage of the course.

The following point is the criteria that the author is suggesting teachers to follow in marking the practice tests that are given to students. All measures should be taken to create a relatively real exam environment. Teacher training courses are required to ensure that teachers of exam based classes are aware of the criteria that are used for evaluation. Hence, teachers should be enrolled for training courses to ensure following the same criteria that are followed in the real

exam environment. The point is, creating real exam environment with all its accompanied arrangements of invigilation and evaluation helps the learners a lot in improving their scores.

2.6 Research Questions

This study is to answer three questions that should affect the type of English Language classes in institutes with similar background to VEDC and STS. This research's questions are: Are Exam Preparation classes more effective for VEDC/STS students to improve their English language skills than General English classes? Does adopting a general English textbook that caters for the syllabus designed and the curriculum strategy enhance the effectiveness of exam based classes? How do Cambridge ESOL Examinations enhance the English learning programme in both VEDC and STS? Answering these questions will help practitioners to deliver successful English learning programmes for students who may share the same background of VEDC/STS students. The following chapters will investigate the answers to reach a conclusion for this study.

Chapter Three

This chapter is concerned with the methodology of this research. It presents the research paradigms and approaches as a base for this paper alongside with the ethical aspect. Brief background information is given to rationalise the way the investigation is done.

3.1 Research Paradigms and Approaches

Education research aims at investigating and understanding social phenomena with an educational nature. It deals with educational questions which require investigations and answers and also it is concerned with the methods of investigations that lead to satisfying answers (Dash, 1993). There are different research paradigms that researchers use based on the nature of research. Conen et al (2000) explains that the positivist paradigm depends on observation and reason to understand human behaviour. In this paradigm, senses and experiment are two elements that researchers use to gather information. Although this paradigm was popular, it was criticized for not considering individual differences that can affect the final results. Therefore, anti-positivism emerged which emphasises that understanding of a social/ educational problem depends on the circumstances and environment of the individual case. Also, it considers the unexplored dimensions of the problem and the multi- interpretation of a single phenomenon. The Paradigm of Critical Theory emerged afterwards by Habermas (1970) who wanted to restrict human freedom and describe historical forces.

Dash (1993) states that research methods differ according to the selected research paradigm. For example surveys and questionnaires are used for quantitative analysis by the positivism paradigm, interviews, observations and case studies for qualitative analysis in the anti-positivism paradigm while action research for Critical Theory. Table 2 below gives more details to research paradigms and corresponding research approaches and methods.

Paradigm	Approach	Method
Positivism	Quantitative	Surveys:
Anti-positivism	Qualitative	case study
Critical theory	Critical and action-oriented	action research

Table 2: Selection of research paradigms and research methods

However, a researcher may adopt different research methods that can better answer the research questions (Dash, 1993).

3.2 Background and Methodology

The methodology followed in this project is a mix between qualitative and quantitative where the data collection was in depth for the specific situation of the STS/VEDC students and industry partners. Two questionnaires for both students and teachers were used to collect data (Appendices A & B). Also, semi-structured interview was conducted with the Career Development Manager of the STS/VEDC who represents the industry partners. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to the STS/VEDC students and teachers (Appendix C). Interviews enable researchers to deal with any ambiguity on the spot. In addition, they give better opportunity to expand on informative points that interviewees may raise. Also, interviews help researchers to obtain spontaneous answers rather than artificial ones.

The Student's questionnaire (Appendix A) was given to two classes of 25 each while the teacher's questionnaire (Appendix B) was given to 14 English teachers. The teacher interview was conducted with VEDC English lead teacher . Three students were interviewed as well. This is in addition to the business unit coordinator interview.

The information which was gathered from the questionnaires, the interviews in addition to the observations of the researcher gives a picture of the needs of the market which receives our students as well as the needs of STS/ VEDC students. This valuable data may result in adopting exam based classes with all its supporters of designing the suitable syllabus,

adopting standards based curriculum and selecting the appropriate general English textbook that best serve the philosophy and the policies of STS/VEDC.

3.3 Triangulation and Research Instruments

In this research, the triangulation approach is used (Bell 2005) to investigate the research questions on the effectiveness of exam based classes with all the supporting elements of designing the appropriate syllabus alongside with adopting standards based curriculum and selecting a suitable textbook. Triangulation means that one tool is not enough to give a true picture of the situation so using more than one tool enables the researcher to be aware of the different point of views which guarantee collecting reliable data on which the study is based. Hence, this research collects data by using questionnaires and interviews in addition to the personal observations of the researcher who taught both types of classes—general English classes and exam based classes in VEDC. Also, STS and VEDC are the case studies for this research. Laws points out in (Bell 2005) that 'the key to triangulation is to see the same thing from different perspectives and thus to be able to confirm or challenge the findings of one method with those of another'. Laws also warns in (Bell 2005) that:

> Accounts collected from different perspectives may not
> match tidily at all. There may be mismatch and even conflict
> between them. A mismatch does not necessarily mean that
> the data collection process is flawed – it could be that people
> just have very different accounts of similar phenomena. You
> need to critically examine the meaning of any mismatches to
> make sense of them.

(Laws 2003: 281)

Triangulation is an effective technique to validate the data since it is collected from multi sources. Triangulation enriches the study because it defeats the shortcomings that may result from single source of data collection. The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. Cohen and Manion (2000) define triangulation as an "attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint." Altrichter et al. (2008)

contend that triangulation "gives a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation." According to O'Donoghue and Punch (2003), triangulation is a "method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data. Denzin (1978) identified four basic types of triangulation:

1. Data triangulation: involves time, space, and persons

2. Investigator triangulation: involves multiple researchers in an investigation

3. Theory triangulation: involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon

4. Methodological triangulation: involves using more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documents. This is the one used in this study. This latter type is the one used in this study since data is collected by using questionnaires and interviews.

Designing a questionnaire that can collect accurate and reliable data is not as an easy task as it sounds. Oppenheim argues in (Bell 2005) that not anyone who can write plain English and have common sense can produce a good questionnaire. Careful wording and clarity of questionnaire items to be interpreted the same way by all survey takers require high level skills. This was clearly reflected in the pilot questionnaire for this study when the researchers thought that the items are straightforward but the responses received showed that there was some ambiguous items that needed rewording. In this study, the attached questionnaires (Appendices A and B) were used to investigate the effectiveness of exam based classes in comparison to general English classes. Using questionnaires as an investigating tool for this study is a successful method to collect the data that are required to help find answers to almost all the research questions that have been raised earlier. In designing the two questionnaires, used for both students and teachers, simplicity was the main factor. Questionnaires can be of no value at all if people find them too complicated to fill. I tried to avoid getting people fill it in for the sake of just finishing it. It is said that saying can be totally different from doing. After piloting the questionnaires, some of the terms used were not as clear as they should. Hence, an explanatory short introduction was given in addition to rewording some items. Piloting the two questionnaires was useful because it helped fine tune the questionnaires that were used for collecting data. Some further details that the first

questionnaires missed were needed to base the study on solid data. The data for each item is compiled and filled in a table before putting them all in one table of many columns to generate the diagram presented in chapter four (Figure 4).

This area of research was explored with a purposive sample. The focus was on teachers and students since they are the people involved in this area of research. This is in addition to an interview with the career development manager who represents STS/VEDC industry partners. The data collected by the questionnaires, interviews and observations may prove the effectiveness Exam Preparation Classes. The research explores some issues that may give advantage to exam preparation classes over general English classes. Issues like motivation, pressure and clearly defined goals are all gearing learner's efforts in exam preparation classes towards better achievement. The collected and analysed data either support the claim of the effectiveness of exam classes or refute it.

3.4 Ethical Aspect

A letter was sent to the director of STS/VEDC to approve distributing two questionnaires on students and teachers and to conduct some interviews with both students and teachers as well as with the career development manager (Appendix E). The purpose was set clear to the director that this study may help STS/VEDC base their practices on solid data which are used for research purposes only and kept anonymous.

The questionnaires were introduced to students thoroughly with some oral explanations on students' first language. Students and teachers were asked not to write their names on the questionnaires to give them the freedom to express their opinions freely. Filling in surveys is a new practice to some UAE students. As such, students were encouraged to take them seriously and a thorough explanation was given on the importance of collecting accurate data to obtain accurate research results that minimise the personal views of the researcher and that base future practices and policies on solid ground.

Chapter Four – Analysis

This chapter is concerned with analysing the data collected by the two questionnaires of students and teachers, the interviews with students, teachers and the career development manager in addition to the observations of the researcher.

One of the explored items in the questionnaires is whether exam based classes are meaningful to learners. The chart below (Figure 4) shows that the sample people see general language classes more meaningful than exam classes since general English classes work on developing the English language skills regardless of the test learners take. On the other hand, exam classes are believed to be just preparing learners to pass an exam by teaching the exam techniques that help them pass or score higher. However, the gap is not big as seen on the chart below. A good number of the sample (whether strongly agree or agree) state that exam classes develop the language skills as well. This is true when exam preparation courses are long enough to develop the English language skills. Exam based classes focus only on exam techniques and on familiarising students with the exam format when there are only few weeks before the exam day.

Other items that were explored are motivation for learning and pressure to make more effort to learn. Since this study is concerned with setting the strategies that can push learners to make effort to learn, these two items are two key factors for the success of the English learning programme. As seen on the chart, the sample's responses indicate that motivation and pressure are clearly noticed to be higher in exam classes than in general language classes. These two items in specific relate strongly to STS/VEDC learning environment that strongly requires putting learners under pressure to push them to make more effort to learn. Since students' lack of motivation has been an issue in the whole region of the gulf in general and in the UAE in specific, exam based classes can be the answer to students' laid back attitude. Orienting learners to the exam they are going to take at the end of the course and setting the rules of pass/fail alongside with making learners aware of the challenges they are facing in the exam and the expected level they need to reach to be successful, all these make learners feel more responsible to make the required effort to learn. Exam anxiety is being exploited for the success of STS/VEDC English learning programme by putting learners under some

pressure to exert the effort needed to progress. There must be some factors to change the culture of passing exams without making efforts to learn and gain success.

Results say that Cambridge ESOL Exams are perceived as skills based exams which require the learners to develop their language skills to pass them. This is true (Appendix E). This point in specific is important for the effectiveness of Exam based classes in developing students' language proficiency. This is closely related to the results that show learners and teachers' support to adopting a textbook whether it is an exam practice or a general English textbook. Although the majority of students expressed their interest in exam practice textbooks, teachers preferred having a general English textbook as well to work on developing language skills.

Furthermore, findings say that many people do not have positive attitudes towards exams. May (1996) states that exams is the thing that everyone likes to hate. This is true to a great extent especially in the gulf region and the whole Middle East area where assessment is based on summative exams that decide whether students are successful or not. In many educational systems in the region, there is no consideration to the effort made during the year in the form of projects and class participation to name a few as much to the final grade students achieve at the end of year exam. This raises students' exam anxiety which affects the whole educational environment and students' attitude negatively. This approach gives priority to the final outcome rather than to the process where real learning happens. Moreover, the nature of the evaluation and assessment is based on knowledge based exams rather than on skills based ones. This in itself is enough to convey a strong message to the learners to neglect the process and give more importance to the final outcome. No doubt that this approach does not help learners to have the academic skills educationalist wish students to acquire like good study skills, research skills, creativity, problem solving, critical thinking...etc. On the contrary, this approach promotes the other side of the coin which is rote learning. Many a learner start getting ready to such knowledge based exams few weeks before the exam date. These weeks are usually enough to gather the knowledge required to pass the exam. Skills based exams are the ones that require going through the whole process of learning and are the ones that best evaluate students' learning.
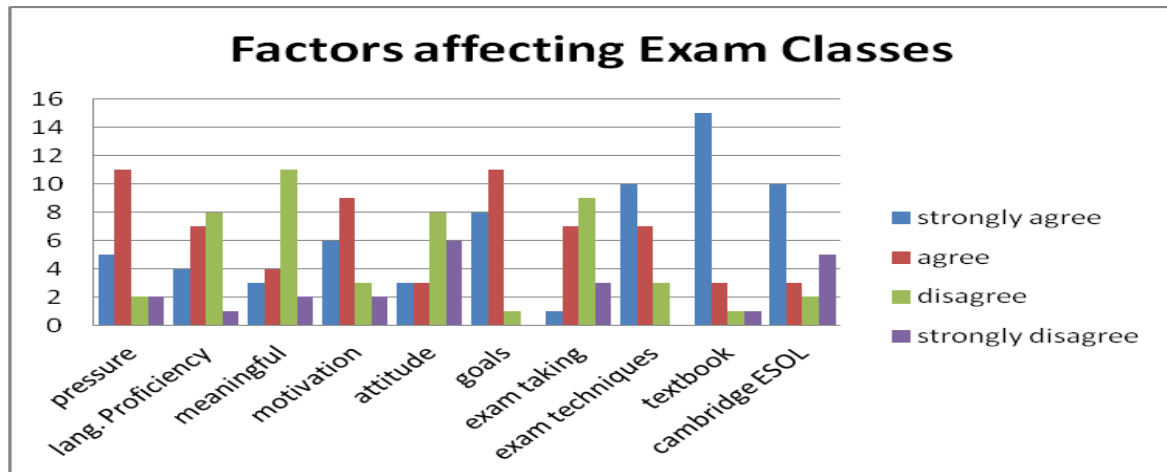
Figure 4   Factors affecting exam classes and general language classes (Appendices A and B)

In addition, the collected data shows obviously that STS/VEDC students prefer having a textbook. Textbooks give student sense of security and sequence. They feel good to know what comes next. Some students even feel bad when teachers skip some exercises from the textbook thinking that they miss important parts. The culture of the place is to follow the textbook page by page with almost no decision from the teachers on what is useful and suitable for the level of students and what is not. Not only do students prefer having textbooks but their parents as well because they facilitate the follow up on their children's progress. Although parents' follow up on VEDC students is almost nil because the majority of VEDC students come from broken homes, they are preferred by STS parents who show much more care about their children's education. VEDC students are different from STS since STS are regular students moving from grade nine in state schools to grades ten, eleven and twelve in STS. More parents' care is given to STS students than VEDC's. Adopting textbooks appeal to both students and parents as well as to teachers. This is true for general English classes. Also, it is very true for exam based classes because adopting a general English textbook emphasises that exam based classes are not to develop exam techniques only but also to develop English language skills. Learners, teachers and teaching material are the three cornerstones in the educational process.

Chapter Five

5.1 Discussions

This section examines the results in light of the literature review introduced earlier as well as this research questions.

Chomsky (1965) indicates that students learn the language because they have a natural device while Skinner (1969) believes that learners acquire the language naturally like any other habit. This study is more concerned with Vygotsky's ZPD (1978) which focuses on developing learners' abilities by giving the initial support that is expressed by 'Scaffolding'. i+ 1 ZPD is a Vygotsky's concept about the realistic improvement a learner can do with some guidance. Accordingly, adopting KET and PET as two stepping stones towards achieving IELTS 4.5 – 5.0 is totally in line with this theory. Learners cannot make a big jump one go. They have to be guided and their skills need to be nurtured gradually. Cambridge ESOL Examinations are designed to offer the required guidance to learners from the literacy level to the advanced one. Therefore, Cambridge ESOL Examinations are believed to be a good base for English language programmes because the set of abilities and skills are clearly defined for each level (Appendix E). Moreover, learners' opportunities of experiencing success and having a sense of achievement are very high with well-structured sets of abilities of CEFR.

Based on the data collected, it is noticeable that Cambridge ESOL examinations are preferred as well since they have become well known in the UAE community for the simple reason that almost all post secondary education as well as most of workplace requires a certain score in IELTS that ranges from 4.5 to 7.0 band score. Both Parents and students showed interest in STS English learning programme because it helps students achieve the IELTS band score required for post secondary education the thing that hinders the majority of general education graduates to enrol in a university or obtain a job.

Since IELTS has been a stumbling block for a lot of learners, some of Cambridge ESOL exams have become popular as well because they are the stepping stones to achieve the required score in IELTS. KET and PET which are Cambridge ESOL exams have become popular because those who are at the beginner level cannot enrol directly in IELTS preparation course but they have to break the journey down into two smaller steps. KET and

PET are two useful steps to take before taking IELTS because they have the same flavour but in a simpler format. KET and PET are equivalent to IELTS 3.0 and 4.0 respectively (figure 2). IELTS is not a good measuring tool to language proficiency for those who are below 4.0 (B1 of CEFR). As such, KET and PET are the two convenient measuring tools that maintain students' confidence and motivate them to enhance their English skills. KET and PET Cambridge ESOL Fact Sheets are attached for more detailed information on the two exams (Appendix E)

The other research question is concerned with adopting a textbook. Both Ur (1991) and Richards (1998) explain the support that textbooks can give to English learning programmes provided they are carefully selected. Textbooks should cater for the curriculum strategy of the institute and must not in any way considered the curriculum or the syllabus. Findings indicate that adopting a textbook in the English language programme is supported by students, parents and teachers as well. The advantages of having the right textbook far overweigh the disadvantages. If textbooks play an important role in general English classes, they should play even a more important role in exam based classes to help avoid falling in the trap of focusing on exam taking techniques only as referred by Burges et al (2004). Ideally, adopting a general English textbook that focuses on developing the English language skills and an Exam Practice textbook that focuses on exam taking techniques can be the best recommended scenario for the learning environment in STS and VEDC. This is a comprehensive plan that tackles students' motivation issues and developing English language proficiency.

This experience of writing a working curriculum for STS and VEDC with all accompanied decisions, policies and practices of designing the syllabus and adopting the textbook to support the exam preparation classes that target clear cut standards mapped to CERF and verified by Cambridge ESOL exams, all of this is not meant to be in stone. Performance is continuously evaluated to maintain the success that is achieved so far. This evaluation goes in a cycle called the policy cycle (Figure 5). Colebatch (2006) explains that the policy cycle includes decisions, implementation and assessment. The decisions that result in a type of performance and implementation are both evaluated to see how effective they are. Accordingly other decisions may be taken which result in some kind of different performance

which is also evaluated for the sake of tuning up and so on. The figure below represents the notion of on-going and continuous evaluation.
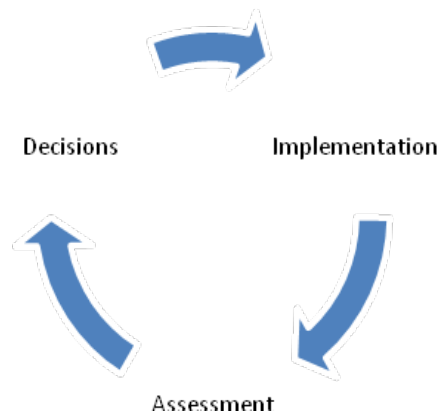

Figure 5 The Policy Cycle

 For example, one of the revised decisions in STS is adopting textbooks called Objective KET and Objective PET of CUP for grades 10 and 11. Taking teachers' feedback and evaluating students' performance, the mentioned textbooks are believed to be exam oriented books rather than skills developing ones. The focus of these textbooks is to familiarise students with the exam lay-out which is KET and PET in this case. As a result, international publishing houses were contacted for some presentations on their latest publications that can match the nature of STS and VEDC students. The English Department represented in 25 English teachers, evaluated the options in light of the curriculum strategy. As a result, the textbook was changed to English Unlimited of CUP instead as it works heavily on developing the English skills.

This study may prove that exam based classes is a very effective strategy for both VEDC and STS. What may enhance its effectiveness is designing the syllabus and adopting the general English textbook that combine developing English skills with practicing exam taking techniques. In addition, the project based approach that is adopted for the learning programme that appeals to kinaesthetic style of learners indicates that the adopted exam classes for VEDC and STS are not meant to be focusing on only familiarising students with the exam they take at the end of the English learning programme. In line with that, exam preparation classes should not be perceived as telling students about the exam. It is rather

thought of as preparing students by developing their English language skills which enable them to do well not only on the exam they are preparing for but also for any other language exam since they have the skills that put them on a good position to deal with any other skills based language test. Moving from the general to the specific, STS/VEDC did the following to have an effective English learning programme: adopted the right curriculum, designed the suitable syllabus, selected the appropriate textbook, set the realistic standards for each year, adopted the exam preparation classes and designed its assessment plan that is based on CEFR and Cambridge ESOL Examinations.

5.2 Limitations

One of the major limitations in this research is the lack of research done on the difference between exam preparation classes and general English classes. It was difficult for the researcher to have enough literature review in the area. On the other hand the same point can be considered as a point of strength because it means that this research is trying humbly to enrich this area and fill in some gaps.

One more limitation in this paper is the focus on two different projects which are STS and VEDC. It is true that they are similar to a great extent but the differences obliged the researcher to have a double focus. Although exam classes are thought to work effectively for both of them, there are many differences in terms of students background, curriculum strategy, syllabus design and adopted textbooks. Moreover, learning outcomes are different and accordingly assessment tools are different. YLE Starters, Movers and then KET are used for VEDC while KET, PET and IELTS are STS assessment tools.

Another point is VEDC students' age group. Since VEDC students are teenagers, setting YLE Starters and Movers as the first two years' assessment tools are not the ideal scenario because they are designed for learners under 10 years of age. The content seems to be childish for teenagers. The challenge that VEDC curriculum strategy faces is the lack of adult Cambridge ESOL assessment tools at literacy level. Pre A1 and A1 levels of CEFR are tested by YLE Starters and Movers which are not the most convenient assessment tools for VEDC students. Although there were some concerns of students' responses when having Young Learners testing materials, it is noticed that VEDC students do not feel offended in any way. To the contrary they enjoyed this colourful, simple and attractive lay-out. VEDC students do

not mind colouring a picture of a rabbit and learn the spelling and simple vocabulary the same way young learners do. VEDC students learn the Alphabet through young learners chants. This can be interpreted that VEDC students strive to experience success after the frustration they went through in state schools. They turn a blind eye to this childish material to gain the simplicity and feel the sense of achievement and success.

5.3 Implications for Future Action

This research's outcomes are highly recommended to be considered for any future similar learning programmes. Following this model should save a lot of effort and time and get the institutes to achieve their goals avoiding all experiments with all the accompanied uncertainty. Ay future similar projects that share VEDC and STS the same or similar background are encouraged to consider the findings of this research as a starting point for further research that may manage to tune this experience of VEDC and STS up for better results. Vocational and technical education institutes are not inferior to main stream education but they are just different. The type of learners should be considered in the curriculum strategy, the syllabus design, selecting the textbook and adopting the appropriate type of English classes that tackle the issue of students' lack of motivation. Furthermore, this very last mentioned point of lack of motivation is not restricted to vocational and technical students but also for main stream education students as well. As such, VEDC and STS experience can be an enriching one for all English language learning programmes since it directly tackles this issue by putting laid back students under some pressures that should stimulate them to make good use of their inactive potential.

Setting clear standards for the different phases of the learning programme with a well structured sequence, deciding on the best teaching materials that get students to achieve these standards, having a good assessment plan that test skills not knowledge, verifying achieving standards by an external international exam and finally adopting exam based classes that develop language skills and practice exam techniques, are the recommendations that can be drawn from this study to all educational institutes that have a similar context to VEDC and/or STS.

Chapter Six – Conclusion

This study is to investigate the effectiveness of adopting exam preparation courses instead of general English courses for STS and VEDC. The rationale behind this study is to question the dominance of general English classes that suffer from some weaknesses which results in ineffective learning programmes that are not able to achieve the learning objectives of the English programme. Some of the weaknesses that feature general English classes in VEDC/STS in specific and that might be extended to state schools and other educational institutes in the UAE are the lack of students' motivation and compromising the standards that learners should reach for each learning cycle. There is a high need to write a curriculum that tackles the whole situation of English language learning programmes in STS/VEDC and across the UAE as well. There is a need for a curriculum that is able to motivate students and set clear standards that should be achieved to make sure that the English learning programme is effective and successful. This high need for such curriculum emerges from the waste of resources that many institutes suffer from. There is waste in money spent on the learning programmes with the expectations of reaching certain standards which rarely happens. Institutes cannot continue the same way they are used to running their English programmes.

The components of STS/VEDC curricula are:

1. **Standards:** It is crucial to decide on the standards the English learning programme is to achieve. The standards are set based on the needs of VEDC/STS industry partners taking into account students abilities. The final outcomes are mapped back to specify starting points for the learning programmes and to break them down into sub-outcomes for each phase and learning cycle of the learning programme. It is clearly understood that compromising reaching the set standards for each phase collapses the whole learning programme ending with far below standards than the set ones. CEFR is used to set the standards. They are international standards that describe the language abilities thoroughly which makes the vision clear for all stakeholders. CEFR works as a road map that describes clearly the expectations from each phase and learning cycle of the English learning programme.

2. **Syllabus:** Designing the syllabus that serves the curriculum strategy and that takes into considerations the style of learning of VEDC and STS students is an important

step to follow. Since standards represents 'what' needs to be achieved, the syllabus decides on 'how' standards can be achieved. There are different types of syllabus that suits different learning situations: the linear format, the cyclical format, the matrix format, the story-line format and the modular format. The cyclical type is adopted for both VEDC and STS because it targets the common themes that are needed for effective everyday communication and that appeal to VEDC/STS students. It is important to mention that Cambridge ESOL exams targets almost the same everyday themes like health, leisure and work which create harmony between the syllabus and the exam students take at the end of the course. One more dimension which was considered while designing VEDC and STS syllabus is the process-oriented approach because it gives more importance to the activities and involvement of learners the thing that matches perfectly with the kinaesthetic style of learning of VEDC and STS students.

3. **Textbook:** Selecting and/or designing the convenient teaching materials that cater to the needs of both students and industry is the important following step. Teaching materials is the tool that is used to achieve the set standards. The whole learning programme can be a complete failure if this point is not considered carefully. Good teaching materials work closely to achieve the learning outcomes of the course through meaningful and attractive activities and practices. Whether to let teachers generate the teaching materials themselves or adopt a commercial textbook is controversial. However, VEDC's experience with letting teachers do the job is not an encouraging one. Different teachers interpret the learning outcomes slightly different which jeopardises the uniformity of the learning programme. In addition, most of the generated materials are hard to compete with the teaching material written by professional curriculum designers in a magazine-like format. Adopting a textbook is supported by the majority of stakeholders: students, teachers and parents. Textbooks can be a good help for both teachers and learners. They help teachers to have plenty of material ready for use and provide them with a well-structured framework. Textbooks help learners as well to work on their own pace and give them the opportunity to advance. Textbooks should not influence the teaching and learning situation. To the contrary, they should be there to offer the help for both teachers and learners. The ideal scenario for an educational institute is to decide its curriculum

beforehand and then make the selection of the textbook that can better serve the curriculum. Leaving textbooks' authors to decide the institutes' syllabi is not an ideal strategy because textbooks are not designed for a specific group of learners in mind. Although budgeting can be a concern to the management but the benefits far overweigh this concern. Ventures in VEDC and Unlimited English in STS of CUP manage to enhance the effectiveness of the English learning programmes. These textbooks are tightly aligned with CEFR levels and standards. The CEFR level is written on the cover page of each book of the two courses. There is a remarkable integrity amongst the different components of the curriculum especially after the use of Cambridge ESOL exams that are professionally designed to evaluate the different standards of CEFR.

4. **Assessment:** a good assessment plan is a cornerstone for the success of the English learning programme. Assessment is the quality assurance measure that makes sure that standards of each phase are achieved before moving up to the following or before graduation. Accurate assessment is the assurance that the institute is on the right track. It also green-lights the current practices indicating that they are at least at acceptable level. A fair, valid and reliable assessment can be the drive for a successful learning programme since it is the mirror that reflects the effectiveness of the day-to-day practices in developing learners' language skills. This point in particular is one of the major weaknesses in state schools learning programmes since students are promoted without achieving the set standards. Accordingly, students are not obliged to make any extra effort to make real development for their skills. VEDC and STS have a separate assessment unit that design the formative and summative assessment that reflects the nature of their students. VEDC/STS evaluate students' skills rather than the knowledge based on competency based approach.

5. **Exam classes:** Adopting exam based classes not general English classes plays an important role in forming VEDC and STS curriculum strategies as they currently stand. The initial drive behind it is setting KET as a graduation benchmark for VEDC which was the first step towards adopting CEFR standards that are perfectly evaluated by Cambridge ESOL exams. This was the first step that lead to mapping the whole programme against CEFR levels using Cambridge ESOL exams like YLE Starters/

Movers for VEDC and PET/ IELTS for STS. Having CEFR standards and Cambridge ESOL exams, it is realistic to adopt this type of classes to help students pass the Cambridge ESOL exams which means achieving the set standards of CEFR. Since Cambridge ESOL exams are skills based exams, it is clear that students cannot pass unless they develop their English language skills which make the focus of the exam classes is to prepare students skills wise and exam techniques wise giving them all the supporting elements to help them achieve the required standards. Adopting a good communicative general English textbook is a vital step for exam based classes to work heavily on developing students' English proficiency in addition to exam techniques. As such, exam based classes manage to prove that they are the type of classes that work effectively for VEDC/STS and that help form a whole curriculum strategy. This explains the reason why the research's focus is on exam based classes with all their corresponding elements that help their effectiveness.

6. **Cambridge ESOL Exams:** Cambridge ESOL exams work as the quality assurance measure and the seal that confirms achieving the standards the English programme is meant to reach. These external international exams verify the results of VEDC/STS internal assessment. Moreover, adopting Cambridge ESOL exams in VEDC/STS curriculum strategies labels the efforts made to learn English with prestigious certificates that are well known to both business market and further education institutes and universities that require certain English proficiency before admitting students into their programmes. IELTS, as one of Cambridge ESOL exams, is the target of many English learners whether for academic, employment or even for immigration purposes. VEDC and STS English learning programmes are meaningful steps towards achieving any of these purposes.

In answer to the research questions, this study proves that Exam based classes are the most convenient type of classes for both VEDC and STS students because students feel more responsible for the outcomes of their learning. Adopting a general English textbook enriches the exam based classes and the English learning programme in STS and VEDC because it emphasises that exam based classes are not concerned with exam taking techniques only but with developing the English language skills as well. Cambridge ESOL examinations put a framework of international standards to the English learning programme in STS and VEDC.

To summarise, the results draw the attention to some important issues. It is quite clear that learners are more motivated in exam based classes than in general English classes. This is because they work towards clearly defined goals in exam classes. The goals are clearly visualised to learners at the end of exam classes in the form of pass or fail result. We all experienced this moment for a number of times in our lives and it is usually unforgettable moments the thing that sticks to our minds and pushes us to work harder to avoid the frustrations of failure and enjoy the joy of success. Exam anxiety can be utilised for the success of the English learning programme in this context. On the other hand, most results illustrate that there is negative attitude towards exams. Therefore, exam classes gain more importance to work on how people view exams and how they should deal with them (exam taking techniques). It is hard to imagine teaching without testing. Hence, learning the skills of taking exams is crucial because joining a university or getting a good job all depend on passing some sort of exam. Exams play an important part in life and this highlights the importance of exam based classes for the simple reason that they ideally work on developing both skills and techniques.

To conclude, VEDC and STS experience in adopting their current curriculum strategies as an overall umbrella to a number of sub strategies and policies is highly recommended for all educational institutes that share them the same or similar background. This should save much time and effort and put them in a better position to have an effective and successful English language learning programme that is based on exam based classes rather than general English classes.

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Appendix A

Students' survey

Research title: Investigation into the impact of Cambridge ESOL exam-based classes on student motivation in Secondary Technical Schools and Vocational Education Development Centre in the UAE

Dear students,

The aim of this survey is to investigate your attitudes towards Cambridge ESOL exams based classes on the motivation of students. Please, be informed that all the collected data is confidential and will only be used for research purposes. So, I will be grateful if you respond to the following sentences honestly as your answers will help me to better understand the effectiveness of Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes compared to general English classes.

Thank you.

1.   Students do not like exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

2.   Students work harder to prepare for the exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

3.   **Students prefer to be prepared for exams.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

4.   **Students are usually more focused when teachers speak about exams.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

5.   Students like to receive a textbook and study it.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

6.   Students feel comfortable when they practice for the exam.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

7.   Students give extra attention to teachers instructions when they give exam techniques tips.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

8.   Practice tests give me confidence and help me get better results.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

9.   English exam based classes are more focused and to the point.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

10. Students like to work towards clearly defined goals.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

11. Exam based classes are stressful.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

12. Exam taking techniques are important for students to have better results.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

13. External exams make students take learning more seriously.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

14. Students expect better marks in internal exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

15. Students prepare better for external exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

16. Cambridge ESOL exams are based on thorough research studies.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Comments:…………………………………………………………………………………
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End of the survey

Appendix B

Teachers' survey

Research title: Investigation into the impact of Cambridge ESOL exam-based classes on student motivation in Secondary Technical Schools and Vocational Education Development Centre in the UAE

Dear colleagues,

The aim of this survey is to investigate your attitudes towards Cambridge ESOL exams based classes on the motivation of students. Please, be informed that all the collected data is confidential and will only be used for research purposes. So, I will be grateful if you respond to the following sentences honestly as your answers will help me to better understand the effectiveness of Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes compared to general English classes.

Thank you.

1. **Students work harder in Cambridge ESOL exams based classes than general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

2. **Teachers better prepare for Cambridge ESOL exams based classes than general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

3. **Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes help improve language proficiency.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

4. **Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes are more focused than general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

5. **Learners are more motivated in Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes than general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

6. **Learners work towards more clearly defined goals in Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes than in general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

7. **Teachers make use of exams to encourage students to work harder.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

8. **Students have positive attitudes towards exams.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

9. **Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes have clearly defined goals than general English classes.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

10. **Teachers like to work towards clearly defined goals.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

11. **Students like to work towards clearly defined goals.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

12. Exam based classes are stressful.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

13. Exam taking techniques are important for students to have better results.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

14. External exams make students take learning more seriously.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

15. Students expect better marks in internal exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

16. Students prepare better for external exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

17. Cambridge ESOL exams are based on thorough research studies.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

18. Cambridge ESOL Exams are skill-based exams.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

19. Cambridge ESOL exams better serve standards based curriculum than general English classes.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

20. **UAE Secondary Technical School students feel more secure with a course book.**

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

21. Exam based classes minimize the need to have a course book.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

22. Standards based curriculum minimizes the need to have a course book.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

Comments:……………………………………………………………………………
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End of the survey

Appendix C

Interview with a Teacher on the effect of Exams based classes on students motivation

- Are you familiar with exams based classes?
- Yes, I'm. To confirm I believe you mean the classes that focus on preparing students to pass a certain exam.
- That's right. In your opinion, do you think exams based classes improve students' language skills?
- At a first glance, the answer is no; but with a more careful look I believe it depends on the type of exam teacher is preparing his/her students for.
- What do you think of Cambridge ESOL Exams in this regard?
- Cambridge ESOL Exams based classes must be effective ones because students need to acquire the English language skills to pass them. This is because they test skills along with the language knowledge.
- If you are to choose between teaching exams based classes or general English classes, which type of classes will you go for?
- I think I'll choose general English classes since they are less stressful. However, I will choose Exams based classes if my students do not have the motive to learn English. Exams can be a good motive for students to make more effort to learn.
- Will you elaborate on the connection between exams based classes and motivation, please?
- I believe I need to make clear distinctions amongst a number of matters here in the context of the UAE students. First, it is noticed that students work harder before the exams to pass. So the drive to make effort is to pass a test not to learn English in many cases. We can kill two birds with one stone if we adopt skills based exams like Cambridge ESOL that should push students to acquire the skills of the English language to pass the exam. One may argue that all classes at schools are exams based classes since students need to take a test at the end of the course. The answer to this is : that is true but the type of the test is what makes the difference. In the UAE context school internal exams are not well reputed for a number of reasons. To name one, the testing environment is so 'friendly' to the extent that students expect to receive 'help' whether from invigilators or from their colleagues during exam sessions. The good thing about external exams is the strict testing environment that urges students to prepare better to pass the test without relying on the 'help' expected to receive from others. Needless to say, Cambridge ESOL Exams are international exams and there are strict testing measures need to follow to guarantee fair results. This way students are trapped between the need to pass a test and the necessity to learn the skills which results in a good outcome.
- When do you think teachers should start preparing their students for the exam in exam preparation classes?

- Teachers should work on improving students English skills till few weeks before the exam. Only then, they can give the tips and familiarise students with the exam layout and exam taking techniques.
- Appreciate your time.
- Thank you and good luck with your research.

Appendix D

Assessment for Grading Policy (DRAFT)
(Secondary Technical Schools)

Purpose and Scope

This policy provides the foundational framework by which student assessment for grading purposes is conducted in Abu Dhabi Vocational Education and Training Institute (ADVETI) Secondary Technical Schools (STS). While informal (or formative) assessment is also conducted for feedback and improvement purposes, these events are not standardised and therefore do not fall within the scope of this policy. The purpose of this policy is to make clear the rules and protocols which relate to formal assessment matters in STS. It is intended for the guidance of staff, students and parents.

Related Policies & Documentation
- ADVETI Assessment Principles Guide
- STS Grading Policy
- STS Vocational course Credit and GPA Policy
- Assessment Validation/Moderation Policy
- Program Documents and Course Guides
- STS Review of Results Policy
- STS Review of results Appeals Policy
- STS Academic Honesty Policy and Procedure
- STS Conduct of Exams Policy

Context

Formal assessment for grading purposes is conducted against clearly identified curriculum standards (learning or performance outcomes). Formal assessment is important in that it provides teachers, students and parents with objective and reportable information about students' progress at particular key stages within the educational cycle. Curriculum standards are clearly identified in key curriculum documents and are used by teaching staff as benchmark outcomes against which they deliver applied teaching and learning activities.

Teaching and learning in STS is conducted in a manner which best reflects the mission of the STS which is to empower UAE youth with the competencies needed for employability and lifelong learning. In keeping with this mission, the STS curriculum is based on the following principles:

- a curriculum that prepares students for the world of work while at the same time satisfying the Ministry of Education's (MoE) school leaving requirements
- a focus on English language development to equip students for success in the modern world
- a "hands on" approach to teaching and learning that emphasises the application of knowledge and the development of skills
- the promotion of important core values such as professionalism, excellence and integrity.

In response to this, and in order to meet the MoE and external vocational provider requirements, an applied and standardised (evidence based) approach to formal assessment is used. Standardised assessment tools and instruments are therefore designed to best support the assessment of the specific curriculum / performance standards while also taking account of the 2nd language nature of STS delivery and other cultural and workplace norms related to the UAE context and the world of work within this region.

Policy

1. The purpose of standardised/centralised assessment is to measure the extent to which students have achieved the required curriculum learning or performance outcomes at a given point in time. This is reflected in their final mark and grade.
2. Students who enrol at an ADVETI STS are to receive full and adequate information about the process that will be used to assess them.
3. The development, implementation and review of student assessment is conducted in accordance with the ADVETI assessment principles and rules of evidence including fairness, validity, reliability, sufficiency of evidence, authenticity, real-world focus and physical/personal/cultural safety. Vocational course assessment also meets workplace and, where relevant, regulatory requirements in line with vocational partner requirements.
4. Assessment is also designed to meet any curriculum specified language, literacy and numeracy standards in addition to the technical. Assessment and evidence requirements beyond those specified in curriculum standards are to be avoided.
5. All STS subjects/vocational courses are to have a standardised assessment strategy covering each academic calendar period and which clearly aligns assessment events to known and specific curriculum performance outcomes as identified in the Subject Curriculum Outline and Topic and Assessment Guide (TAG).
6. Assessment strategies are to be collaboratively developed by the STS Subject team which incorporates the relevant Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) Manager or delegate. The strategy is to take into account any specific MoE, VET partner or external body requirement related to the subject/vocational course. This includes the need for centralised exams for academic subjects and external certifications (e.g. IC3, English benchmark tests etc).
7. Assessment strategies are to be designed to utilise a range of suitable and appropriate assessment methods – especially those that are applied and best fit local learning styles.
8. Assessment strategies are to contain both standardised (locally delivered) and centralised (cross-campus delivered) assessments. Each assessment is to be accompanied by a marking guide / scheme / rubric which clearly and objectively identifies and describes the criteria being assessed as well as the various levels at which performance can be demonstrated and the related allocation of marks. This supports effective internal moderation processes.

9. Rubrics and associated mark allocation details for standardised assessments are to be given to students in advance. This is to ensure process fairness and integrity in terms of how educational judgements will be made. This includes centralised final exams.
10. All assessment is to be designed to best test a student's level of performance as authentically as possible against specific identified curriculum standards.
11. Assessment strategies should be designed to gather a sufficient level / amount of evidence from which a sound educational judgement can be made. Given the amount of assessment students undertake, it is important that they are not over-assessed for grading purposes.
12. All standardised assessments within a subject/vocational course are to be internally moderated by the relevant teachers to ensure common agreements on the application of the marking guide / rubric and in turn, consistency of scoring across groups and campuses.
13. All STS subject assessment strategies are to be validated to ensure their ongoing relevance against curriculum performance requirements and the world of work (*see Assessment Validation Policy*). Where validation outcomes identify the need for changes, these should be implemented in the next available academic period.
14. Assessment for vocational courses can only be conducted independently by teachers who hold a qualification that meets the VET partner accreditation requirements.
15. Student assessment is to be accurately recorded and reported.
16. The original assessment work of students (evidence) is to be retained for a period not exceeding one year after graduation.
17. Students may only undertake a missed **coursework** assessment event (as identified in the approved TAG) within 2 weeks of it falling due where it can be substantiated by the proper authority (e.g. an authorised medical practitioner) that the student was subject to misadventure at the time the documented assessment was held. This includes circumstances such as sudden hospitalisation, sickness, death of family member or other valid reasons as authorised by the STS Principal or delegate.
18. Students missing an end of term '**system-wide**' exam for an authorised reason will be offered a catch-up exam in the first week of the following term for Terms 1 and 2 or in the end of year resit period as identified in the STS academic calendar for Term 3.
19. Students who do not pass an academic subject are considered eligible for an academic subject resit exam if he/she has not passed 2 subjects as determined by the cumulative year mark. A resit exam for an academic subject is to be designed as a single event covering all curriculum outcome requirements for that Grade. At least 60% of the resit exam should reflect the curriculum outcomes from Term 3. Should this resit still result in a mark that does not meet the passing requirement, the student will be required to repeat the entire year as per MoE requirements.
20. A student is considered eligible for a vocational course resit if he/she has been deemed not competent in any vocational course as determined by the total course mark. Resit assessments are to be centrally designed as single events for that course covering all element requirements of that course. These resits are to be undertaken in the Examination period of the same term in which they were delivered. Students still deemed as not competent in the resit assessment may be offered 1 additional re-sit exam. Where it is not possible to conduct the re-sits in the Examination period then these should take place before the end of the first month of the following term.
21. Remedial Assistance is to be provided to students as soon as academic issues are identified.
22. A student who passes a resit, regardless of the mark they attained, will only receive a maximum final mark of 60%.
23. Students who do not meet progression requirements will be given the opportunity to repeat a grade year once.

24. No student will be allowed to repeat more than once during their 3 year tenure with STS.
25. Students must pass all required subjects / vocational courses at Grades 10, 11 and 12 level within the accredited program in order to complete their studies and be awarded an MoE stamped STS Leaving Certificate.
26. In line with the ADVETI Appeals Process, students may appeal the process in which a subject / course was assessed.
27. Assessment will comply with licensure and accreditation standards of the MoE, Certification Body and/or any vocational education and training (VET) international partner.

Subject / Course Assessment

Each subject/course is to contain a sufficient, but not excessive number of assessments that contribute to final grading. The number of events in an assessment strategy is to be based on sound educational judgment depending on factors such as the performance requirements in curriculum outcomes, relative size of the subject, learner preferences, assessment approaches, timetabling limitations etc.

Holistic assessment of curriculum performance outcomes is strongly encouraged wherever possible. The ADVETI Assessment Principles including the rules of evidence are to be followed for all assessment activities.

Subject / Course Assessment Strategy

The CDU in consultation with the Subject Team will provide direction on assessment methods and weightings. The strategy is to be designed to best meet the demands of the curriculum outcomes, reflect good practice and take account of the workloads, timetables and preferences of STS students, whilst meeting the requirements of MoE. The Head of CDU will approve the assessment strategies.

The assessment strategy is to utilise major and/or minor summative assessment events to ensure that all outcomes/elements of the subject/competency have been covered and that the mix of all assessment adds to 100%. It should also reflect the principle for vocational courses that performance should be assessed as being demonstrated over time, in a variety of contexts and using more than one assessment method.

Major assessment events assess the learning of all elements (or learning outcomes) of the academic subject or vocational course competency. Each event should *not to be weighted at more than 50%* of the course total unless it is for external benchmark subjects.

Minor assessment events assess only specific subject / course elements (or learning outcomes). Each minor event is ***not to be weighted at more than 30%*** of the total.

The selected assessment strategy must total 100% and include **at least one major assessment event** per term (academic) or per course (vocational).

Additional 'formative' learning activities are strongly encouraged to facilitate informal ongoing evaluation and feedback as part of effective learning design.

Example Implementation

The following provides examples of scenarios for subject / course assessment strategies that meet the policy requirements. These should be used by Subject Teams as a Guide.

Example of a 3 Assessment Strategy	Examples of a 4 Assessment Strategy	
Minor Event 1 - 20%	Minor Event 1 - 20%	Minor Event 1 - 10%
Major Event 2 - 40%	Minor Event 2 - 20%	Minor Event 2 - 30%
Major Event 3 - 40%	Minor Event 3 - 20%	Major Event 3 - 20%
	Major Event 4 - 40%	Major Event 4 - 40%

Assessment Range and Type

A range of assessment types is to be applied across the subject/course. These may include, and are not limited to, methods such as structured activities, questioning, interviews, role plays, simulated real-world or workplace tasks, observation, quizzes, research, completed workbooks, physical or electronic portfolios, projects, artworks or presentations, self or peer evaluation, tests, exams etc.

Topic and Assessment Guides (TAG)

Following the design of the subject / course assessment strategy, the nominated Team Leader in consultation with the subject teachers is to develop a Topic and Assessment Guide (TAG) that is aligned with the curriculum requirements of the subject/course and the approved assessment strategy. This will clearly identify:

- the curriculum elements / learning outcomes and how they relate to the identified topics and content
- the number of subject/course assessment events
- the weighting of each assessment
- the assessment type and/or method
- the relationship of each of the assessments to specific curriculum elements / learning outcomes
- the date (or week) for assessment submission or sitting
- the method used for determining the final subject / course grade
- required or recommended additional resources associated with the subject/course

The completed TAG, is then to be approved by the Head of the CDU prior to subject/course delivery. In the first week of the subject/course, students are to receive a copy of the approved TAG from their teacher who is to clearly explain it. Students are to then acknowledge that they have both received and clearly understood the TAG including the subject / course assessment requirements. The current approved version of the STS TAG template is to be used at all times. This is obtainable from the ADVETI Curriculum Development Unit.

Marking Guides / Rubrics / Schemes

Standardised rubrics and marking guides are to be used for each assessment event. These are to conform to awarding body requirements and be jointly developed by the Subject Team and relevant CDU Manager.

Finalized marking guides or rubrics are to be supplied to students in a reasonable time period prior to assessment. They are also to be clearly explained. To support validation and moderation processes, marking guides or rubrics are to be applied consistently by all teachers who are teaching the subject/course simultaneously. Marking rubrics should always clearly identify:

1. the differences between levels of performance (mastery) in plain English
2. the allocation of marks for each performance level.

Teachers are to ensure that there is evidence of internal moderation for each assessment event.

Use of Approved Course Documents

The proposed subject / course TAG and the assessment marking guide / rubrics / scheme are to be sent to the relevant CDU manager at least one working week prior to delivery (not including approved holiday periods). The Head of CDU will then upload the approved documents to the central curriculum repository and make them accessible to subject/course teachers prior to delivery. To ensure standardization and version control, all teachers are

responsible for using only approved course documentation from the central curriculum repository.

Assessment Event Documentation/Cover page

An 'Assessment Event Documentation' form is to be completed for each assessment event by the Subject Representative in collaboration with the current course teaching team. The completed document is to be stored electronically and then provided to students in advance. The form should contain:

- Course and program name and code
- Date of the event or required submission date
- Student name / number
- Identification of the assessment event number from the assessment strategy
- Total marks of the assessment event / weighting from the assessment strategy
- Duration of the assessment event
- Learning Outcome / Competency elements being assessed by the event
- The Assessment instructions and any related information
- A section for student declaration (dated signature) as to the authenticity of submitted work
- A section enabling student comment on their result
- A declaration from both the Teacher and Student that feedback has been given and is understood.

Written feedback should be provided to students no more than two (2) weeks after the event and should be specific, related to the outcomes / elements being assessed and any marking scheme or rubric descriptors.

Assessment Archiving

Teachers are to ensure that the submitted original work of students is archived by the School in line with MoE and VET partner requirements.

Policy Responsibilities

Students will:

- Adhere to assessment policies
- Use assessment to support learning
- Comply with requirements of assessment processes
- Be accountable for the originality and validity of assessment submissions
- Follow staff instruction regarding collection of assessment items
- Keep a copy of all assessment submissions (including developmental work) in a safe place so that others may not access them
- Participate in group assessment activities as required.

Teaching Staff will:

- Adhere to ADVETI assessment policies, procedures, principles and rules of evidence
- Incorporate assessment methods which best support student learning within the UAE context
- Provide effective, timely and sufficient feedback to encourage continuous learning and development
- Recognise the accreditation requirements of the assessment process (MoE and VET partner) and fulfil their requirements effectively and in a timely manner.

Policy Definitions
Academic Subject

Subjects that are not vocational courses. This includes Islamic, Arabic, English, ICT, Maths, Science, Citizenship/Health and Life Skills.

Assessment

The process of collecting evidence and making professional judgements on the level of competency achieved as expressed by the curriculum learning outcomes.

Assessment tools: The instruments and procedures used to gather and interpret evidence of competence. The instruments are the specific questions or task/activity used to assess competence including acceptable performance and decision-making rules. The procedures are the information or instructions about how the assessment is to be conducted and recorded.

Assessment methods: The particular assessment techniques or modes used to gather different types of evidence. This may include questioning, direct observation, practical application, structured activities, third party feedback, e-portfolios and review of products etc.

Authenticity: One of the rules of evidence. To accept evidence as authentic, an assessor must be assured that the evidence presented for assessment is the student's own work and acknowledges the work of others appropriately.

Competency: Competency can only be inferred from performance against the curriculum requirements (elements and performance criteria). Assessors will need to think about the sorts of performances which will

enable us to gather evidence of sufficient quantity and quality to make sound judgments about a student's level of individual's competence.

Fairness: Assessment tools and tasks are considered fair when they do not disadvantage particular students, and the assessment places all students on equal terms regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, language or disability. It requires clear communication between the assessor and the student to ensure that they are fully informed about, understand and are able to participate in the assessment process. It also includes an opportunity for the person being assessed to appeal the result of the assessment and to be reassessed if necessary in line with ADVETI appeals policy requirements.

Flexibility: One of the principles of assessment. To be considered flexible, assessment should draw on a range of methods appropriate to the context, competency and candidate. There is no single approach or set of approaches to the assessment of performance that fits all needs.

Formative Assessment: An evaluation activity that helps a teacher or student to make a judgement on progress and current levels of performance. Such activities are conducted for the purposes of continual learning through encouragement and improvement based on quality feedback.

The outcome of a formative assessment is not to be used for summative grading purposes.

Holistic assessment: Refers to an integrated approach to assessment which seeks to combine knowledge, understanding, problem solving, technical skills, attitudes and ethics into assessment events. Wherever possible assessment events should be designed to cover several competencies, element or performance criteria outcomes and reflect the 'real' nature of work within the context of the relevant industry.

Marking scheme: is a tool which explicitly states expected objective answers and how marks are allocated.

Major assessment event: assesses the competence of all elements within a course.

Minor assessment event: assesses the competence of certain identified elements within the course.

Moderation: Moderation is a quality control process that involves teachers discussing and reaching agreement about assessment outcomes. It enables teachers to develop a shared understanding of the requirements of a specific accredited course including the relevant standards and assessment guidelines, the nature of evidence and its collected and the basis on which assessment decisions are made. Moderation is the process of bringing scores and standards into alignment. It is an active process in the sense that adjustments to students' results are made.

Principles of assessment: To ensure quality outcomes, assessment practices should be valid, reliable, flexible and fair.

Reasonable adjustment of assessment: Reasonable adjustment is alternatively known as modified assessment and is the practice of adjusting or modifying an assessment to meet the particular needs and characteristics of the students being assessed. This includes any changes to the assessment that meet the individual needs of a student with a disability. The determination of 'reasonableness' requires judgement that balances the effect on the organisation with the need to maintain the integrity of the assessment.

Reliability: One of the principles of assessment. Reliability refers to the degree to which evidence presented for assessment is consistently interpreted and results in consistent assessment outcomes. Assessment practices are reliable when teachers work together to compare and refine the assessment tools they are using to develop a common interpretation of the assessment requirements.

The assessment methods, tools and tasks are consistent when assessments are equivalent in different places and at different times.

Rubric: A rubric is a scoring tool that explicitly represents the performance expectations for an assignment or piece of work. A rubric divides the assigned work into component parts and provides clear descriptions of the characteristics of the work associated with each component, at varying levels of mastery. Rubrics can be used for a wide array of assessment types.

Rules of evidence: These are closely related to the principles of assessment and provide guidance on the collection of evidence to ensure that it is valid, authentic, current and sufficient. Regardless of the form of evidence, where it was collected, or who collected it, teaching staff must evaluate the quality of the evidence and be confident that assessment judgements are based on the rules of evidence.

Sufficiency: One of the rules of evidence. Sufficiency relates to the quality and quantity of the evidence assessed. It requires the student to provide a range of assessment evidence that is enough to ensure that all aspects of competency have been satisfied for the course and that a level of competency can be demonstrated repeatedly for grading purposes.

Validation: The process of reviewing, comparing and evaluating the assessment processes, tools and evidence that contribute to judgments made by a range of assessors against the same standards. Validation is a quality review process for improving the way a course or group of courses is assessed. A validation exercise typically focuses on the assessment tool including the assessment tasks, scoring rubrics and/or judgements of a sample of assessors. A validation process involves checking that the assessment tool produces sufficient, current, valid and authentic evidence to determine whether the standards defined in the accredited course have been met. It includes reviewing and making recommendations for future improvements to the assessment process, the assessment tools and tasks, the evidence collected, and the interpretation of that evidence in order to make a judgement of competence in relation to the course. Validation can occur before, during and/or after assessment.

Validity: One of the principles of assessment and also one of the rules of evidence. Assessments are valid when they assess what they claim to assess. Assessment against the course competency must cover the broad range of skills and knowledge that are essential to competent performance.

Policy Accountabilities

> **Implementation:**   Academic Vice-Principals

> **Compliance:**   Head of CDU

POLICY REVISION HISTORY						
Version No.	Approved / Rescinded	Date	Approved by	Resolution Number	Review Date	Document Reference
1.21		May 2012			May2013	

Appendix E

Hardcopies of STS Entry Tests (English and Math)

Hardcopies of KET and PET Factsheets

A Hardcopy of STS/VEDC Director's Approval for carrying out the study on STS/VEDC students and staff