



POLYGLOT AMBASSADOR WHO NEVER LEARNT LANGUAGES THROUGH COURSES, EXCEPT ENGLISH TAUGHT AT SCHOOL

According to the tradition, “Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan” electronic journal would like to present an informative interview with an outstanding diplomat, amazing person, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of Sultanate of Oman. Muhammad Al-Lavati let us prepare an interesting material to read with his wise answers, wide outlook and good understanding of the importance of multilingualism and intercultural communications.

— **What do you think about the importance of multilingualism and education of foreign languages in the world?**

— First of all, thank you for organizing this talk. I think that knowledge in foreign languages is right now very topical, because now the world is so close with each other due to languages. With languages everything is easier and quicker. Modern gadgets, even simple telephones today have a translator and they can translate everything. You feel like you are speaking foreign languages with them. However, you should learn the languages, because there is a social and psychological barrier between people without the fluency in foreign languages. Once you have proper language skills, this barrier collapse and your life gets more interesting and convenient. In fact, when I was the ambassador of Oman to Pakistan, I learnt and spoke Urdu there and things were very easy. It is important to know the languages, especially, English, Arabic, French, Spanish and German. Uzbek is also very good language, it is very important for those who want to discover the Turkic languages. I wish I spoke it.

— **It would be interesting hear from you about how education in Oman structured? What is the role of foreign languages education in your country?**

— Basic education system of Oman is very similar to the one you have in Uzbekistan. We have elementary, preparatory and secondary schools, which are free of charge for everybody. Then you go to university after 12 years. There are government universities where you can study free with certain points you have collected in previous stage of education. It is very pleasant to tell you that most of

the students studying in higher educational establishments, especially in Sultan Qabus University, are women. There are seven private universities and international universities, including accredited German and American higher educational institutions. We do not have yet a university of foreign languages like here, but we have a section in Sultan Qabus University. Different languages are taught here. When it comes to mentioning about the curriculum, we start teaching English at a very early age, because it is very important. Omani schools are bilingual: classes are conducted in Arabic and English. In addition, most of the scientific subjects are taught in English language. Urdu and Persian are also in the

list of languages that Omani people learn and speak in their daily life.



— **You mentioned about the fact that in Oman foreign languages are started to teach from early ages. You know that couple of years ago according to the Presidential Decree our schools also**

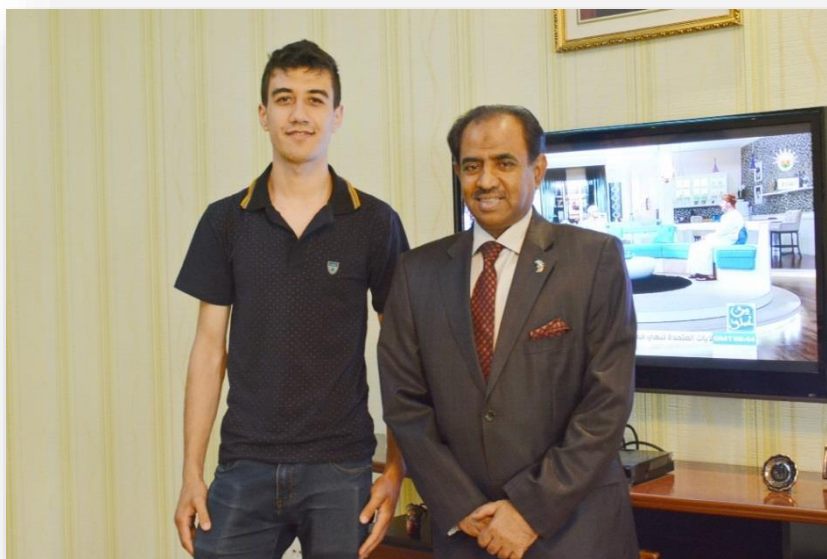
started to conduct English language classes from first grade at schools. As a diplomat working in Uzbekistan, what are your thoughts about the foreign languages education reforms undertaken here?

— As I know, because of your historical relations, during Soviet period Russian was a priority language to teach. Still long years of colonization shows its results in many Uzbek people's concern in speaking Russian language. We can see now that things are changing. I have been here for the third year and observed many changes in foreign languages education. People are trying to learn other languages too. Before starting to speak about English language, I would like to mention that I am pretty impressed by the level of Arabic spoken by many of our colleagues from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, the importance of English is rising, as it is an international language and the language of business and technology. The system of teaching foreign languages as well as the interest of people has been developing for past years.

— **We know that Oman embassy has collaboration with the Uzbekistan State World Languages University. What can you tell about the bilateral relations and your impressions about the university?**

— I was there for the first time in May 2015 and I was very much impressed. I heard more than 30 languages are thought there. It was an impressive information for me to hear that most of the student body is from the female side. It shows that women here are very active and especially in learning foreign languages. The world of work and labor market welcome all those who are good at languages. I am looking forward to much more cooperation with the Uzbekistan State World Languages University and collaborations between universities here and our university, particularly Sultan Qabus University.

— **During your tenure, you might have been closely introduced with our culture and traditions. What do you think our cultures have in common? Which cities of Uzbekistan have you been to? What are your impressions about them?**



— I think we have a lot of in common, because we are in the same region. We share many traditions and customs in every sphere of life, as we are Muslims. Especially, weddings and other ceremonies are alike to each other. People here look like Omani people. The only thing that is different from Oman is that there we do not eat plov early in the morning. However, other things, the music, the dances and arts have many similarities. The tendency that you have here very special is that most of the dancers are women, while in Oman, because of our culture, majority of dancers are men. Now women are coming, but still their part is very small. Here, we can see women mostly do the beautiful Uzbek dancing and it is very interesting to watch.

— I have already been to Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench and Andijan in Ferghana Valley. They are very beautiful! Especially, Samarkand is a piece of art, where everywhere you will find monuments, cultural heritage. Every places of

interest speak a lot about something from ancient history. Bukhara is also an old beautiful city and Khorazm is the place where you visit you will be very amazed about how Muslims were really developed and appreciated culture and science. In addition, I will really try to get more time to go and see more cities of Uzbekistan, because it is very interesting.

— **Learning language is an individual thing. Everyone has its own way of acquiring language skills. How many languages do you speak? And what methods of learning foreign languages do you prefer?**

— I speak six languages, but I never learnt any language with school, except for English. Due to my interaction with people, I learnt Hindi, Urdu, Arabic, Persian and Russian. I can manage myself in these languages, but I never went to school for them. I cannot write in them. I can speak and understand everything. However, I should work more at my Russian. It is content-based learning where you acquire knowledge and skills through communications with people. I remember when I went to Iran, I was very young and I learnt the language in one month. Because I was young and very energetic. Therefore, by the end of the month, I was speaking very fluent Persian. I can understand it now, but I cannot talk it. I think if you have the desire to learn the language, you will do it. However, even if you go to school, but you do not have the desire, you cannot do it.

**By Saidaziz Azamov.
Photos by Madina Nurman.**