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After being made redundant at Barclays Capital in New York City, Shirley Chu, 30, came to Dubai and invested Dh8,360 in a 120-hour TESOL course, hoping to find employment as an English teacher. Paulo Vieira / The National

Back in the classroom

Hard times can mean new careers for some. Amid mass redundancies, more and more professionals from diverse backgrounds are becoming certified to teach English in search of a fresh start. Lizzy Millar reports

Shirley Chu had always enjoyed her career in finance. After graduating from Fairleigh Dickinson University, in New Jersey, with a degree in social science, she landed a job in 2001 with Barclays Bank working as a corporate analyst. Over the course of several years there she built a solid reputation for herself while earning a respectable annual salary of US\$65,000 (Dh238,761).

But her success was interrupted by the recent recession. In September 2008 Ms Chu, 30, was sitting at her desk at Barclays Capital in Manhattan when Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Within a month, as the financial crisis set in, her employer started offering redundancy packages to entice staffers to leave voluntarily.

She decided to take the money and run. "I'd spent all my life in New York," Ms Chu, who didn't want to reveal the terms of

her redundancy package, says. "I felt it was time to get out of the city and explore my opportunities in the rest of the world."

In 2007, Ms Chu had visited a friend in Dubai and enjoyed the experience. So she decided to return to the Emirates in December 2008 to search for work.

But she found that securing a position in the financial industry wasn't easy.

"I didn't have much luck getting a job, as banks were cutting down over here," she explains. "I needed to rethink my career, and where I was headed."

Ms Chu never thought her job search would lead to a classroom. However, after attending a taster session at the Eton Institute in Dubai in September 2009, she spent Dh8,360 to enrol in a 120-hour TESOL course at the centre, which conducts classroom training in more than 17 languages

and offers online and software courses in more than 100 tongues.

Ms Chu, who was in a class with 19 other students, quickly discovered that she wasn't the only one seeking a new career path. Eton instructors estimate that 20 per cent of students who enrol in the intensive four-week course have been made redundant within the past year.

Indeed, for a growing number of expats, TESOL, or Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, has become a practical and attainable source of employment during these challenging times.

Although Arabic is the official language of the UAE, many people say they couldn't get by without having a firm grasp of English – the international language of business. This, naturally, keeps instructors in gainful employment.

"Analysts project over 30 per cent growth in teaching jobs over the next decade, making it one of the most sought after professions in the near future," says Dr Elh Abi Rached, the managing director of the Eton Institute.

"There is a huge demand, particularly for teachers of English as a foreign language, both domestically and abroad," he says. "Although certification programs such as the TESOL/TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) are helping speed up the process of becoming a teacher, there is still an acute shortage, with demand far outstripping supply."

In response to this demand, TESOL Arabia (www.tesolarabia.org), a non-profit organisation established for English-language teachers based in the Gulf, is planning to host its first career fair to match hundreds of recruiters with aspiring instructors. The event will be held on Feb 6 at Zayed University in Dubai.

There are TESOL Arabia chapters in Abu Dhabi, Fujairah and Sharjah.

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yourblog

The Motley Fool (www.fool.com) is an ideal resource for the average investor. Featuring basic, off-beat advice on investing, finding a broker, retirement planning and saving money, this website is now featuring The Fool's 2009 Year in Review and 2010 Predictions.



Sue Brett instructs TESOL students – including Shirley Chu, second from left – at the Eton Institute at Knowledge Village in Dubai. Many unemployed individuals are turning to teaching English after being made redundant. Paulo Vecina / The National

'The course paid off; I learnt to teach something I've taken for granted'

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Similarly, the UAE British Council plans to roll out an increased number of four-week Certificate in English Language Training to Adults (CELTA) this year. These will be held across the country, at institutions such as the University of Abu Dhabi, the council's headquarters in Dubai and TESOL Arabia offices in Sharjah and Muscat. The four-week CELTA course costs Dh9,000. This year, TESOL Arabia plans to hold four courses in Abu Dhabi and two in Dubai starting in March, double the number it held last year.

"A CELTA qualification gives you the methodology to put teaching English as a second language into practice in the classroom," says Ian Shears, a representative of the British Council in Abu Dhabi. Mr Shears adds that between 70 and 80 per cent of the graduates from his organisation's programme find suitable employment soon after graduation, either with the Council, through freelance tutoring or by moving abroad for a position.

Ms Chu says she's confident the hours and money she has invested will help her find gainful employment teaching English either in the UAE or her ancestral homeland of China.

And the odds seem to be in her favour. According to the UK-based company i-to-i (www.i-to-i.com/tefl), 20,000 advertisements for English instructor positions are posted each month around the world.

Salaries range from US\$2,000 per month for teaching in Japan to US\$1,600 in South Korea and US\$1,900 in Thailand. Most assignments include flights to the country of employment, medical insurance, subsidised or no-cost accommodation and lessons in the language of the assignment country.

The i-to-i website provides a free placement service for candidates meeting employers' criteria.

As an indicator of the possible student pool, i-to-i predicts that in the UK alone 10 per cent of Britain's 400,000 recent university graduates will be unable to find employment in 2010, double the figure of last year.

Needless to say, teaching English

as a second language is big business for both instructor and tutor. The Eton Institute's four-week course is typically attended by 10 to 20 students, a third of whom do not speak English as their first language; recent students have hailed from India, Russia, Lebanon and Finland, among other locales.

Eton held its first course at the beginning of 2009, and has since then run three classes. The institute will be holding another introductory session today for a new course that will begin shortly thereafter, depending on demand.

The certificate granted by Eton is accredited by the London College of Teacher Training and is equivalent to a UK-based National Vocational Qualification level four.

A budget alternative is online TEFL courses, and they are often less expensive. For instance, a 160-hour course offered by the London College of Teacher Training costs only Dh1,746 and awards successful students a TEFL certificate (see www.teachenglish.co.uk for further information). Another site worth

consulting is the Virginia-based www.tesol.org, which posts job vacancies and provides would-be students with details about training courses in the US and Canada.

And the courses have universal appeal. Many people who are not native English speakers use TESOL training to adapt teaching their mother tongue to the standard curriculum, and most courses are open to anyone who can proficiently speak, read and write English. This means that bilingual students can go on to teach two languages using the same methods. In addition, some students say they prefer to be taught English by a tutor who shares their native tongue.

As one Moscow-born Eton student, who declined to give her name, put it, "It makes learning English easier if the teacher can explain the definition of a word in both languages."

But English is not the only language in demand. Russia and China continue to drive a demand for people wanting to learn Mandarin and Russian for business.

Olga Stenqvist, the director of Target, a language centre based at Dubai's Knowledge Village, says she receives a steady stream of requests from adults who want to learn English or Russian for business purposes, but adds that the main bulk of her customers are Russian-speaking youngsters attending international schools.

"In order to get by and get on in life abroad, they need to grasp the fundamentals of the English language," Ms Stenqvist says.

She set up the centre in 2005, two years after she completed a CELTA course with Wood James Consultants in Dubai in 2003.

"Not only is our aim to bring students up to standard, but to give them confidence when conducting and expressing themselves in English," she explains. And Mrs Stenqvist, who has a master's degree in linguistics, says there is a shortage of certified native-speaking English teachers in the UAE.

So is teaching English as lucrative as it's cut to be? Freelance tutors can expect to earn between

Dh100 and Dh150 an hour, and usually work from the client's home or at a language and training centre.

Tutors can command a higher fee for teaching groups of students or holding lessons for corporations, and bilingual teachers of certain in-demand languages, such as Mandarin and Russian, can charge up to Dh150 an hour.

A quick search of Dubizzle, the popular UAE-based marketplace and networking site, reveals several vacancies for English tutors in private residences. Tutors can also work independently within a free zone, provided they are registered as freelance workers or are listed as a dependent on their spouse's visa. British-born Sookhi Tuite falls under the latter category. Ms Tuite, 29, quit her cabin crew job with Emirates in January 2008 to retrain as an English teacher.

She paid Dh9,000 to complete an intensive course at Wood James Consultants in Dubai before spending the better part of 2009 teaching in South Korea.

Today, Miss Tuite, herself half

Korean, is back in Dubai teaching English on a permanent basis at Ms Stenqvist's Target. She says her ultimate goal is to return to her native UK to continue her education, and wants to teach English at the high school level.

"The mark of a good teacher is seen in how good their students are progressing. For me that's a real challenge," she says.

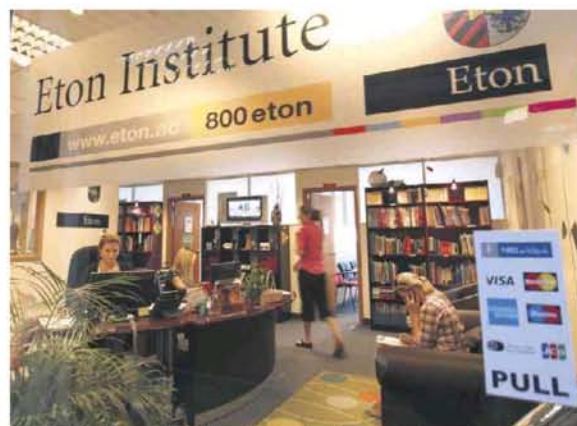
Meanwhile, with a TESOL certificate under her belt, Ms Chu, the former Barclays banker, is now looking for work, applying to language centres in the UAE and researching possibilities in China.

"The course paid off, as I learnt how to actually teach something that I've always taken for granted. It was both demanding and rewarding," she says. "Now I just want to put it into practice by finding students."

But could Miss Chu be persuaded to return to banking?

"Certainly if the right job came along. But for now I'm happy to pursue teaching. It's what I enjoy and want to do."

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Eton Institute in Dubai has experienced an increase in business due to the recession. Paulo Vecina / The National

where to learn how to teach English

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www.britishcouncil.org/me-uae

Abu Dhabi Men's College
www.admc.hct.ac.ae/internet/02445154

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