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1st MEC TESOL Conference 2018

Muscat, Oman
29th March ,2018
1st MEC TESOL Conference 2018

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29th March, 2018
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Foreword

It is with deep gratification that I write this Foreword to the Proceedings of the 1st MEC TESOL conference organized by the Middle East College, Muscat, Oman, on the 29th of March, 2018. The carefully chosen conference theme, “English in the changing local and international context”, encompasses the issues and challenges faced by TESOL professionals today. They are constrained to address the local as well as international requirements in curriculum design, selection of pedagogical models, and material design. The aim of the conference was to encourage interaction among ELT practitioners, researchers, and curriculum developers by providing them a platform to share best practices and a vision of future developments in the changing English language teaching and learning environments.

English has become the preferred lingua franca in most parts of the world to the extent that the non-native students of English in higher education have outnumbered the first language speakers of the language. As language teachers we share the common vision of preparing our students to effectively communicate and collaborate with the people across the globe in the English language and simultaneously maintain their cultural identity. The challenge faced by educators is to accommodate the dynamic interplay between the local and international demands and the fast paced changes which are a result of the technological advances. This can only happen when there is dialogue between academicians in similar contexts as they share their research findings, challenges faced, lessons learned and success stories.

The presented papers contributed interesting insights in the field of TESOL, especially in the Middle Eastern contexts. The review process ensured that each paper contributes a new theme and adds to the existing body of knowledge. The major sub themes covered by the selected papers are: Use of ICTs in language learning; Challenges of academic writing; curriculum design; Communication strategies; Language through literature; and Peer assisted language learning.

I trust that these Proceedings will provide TESOL professionals with useful insights into the latest research developments. I am also certain that these proceedings will be a stimulus to inspire further study and research.

I would like to thank all the authors for their contributions and the dedicated reviewers for their expert comments. Last but not the least, thanks are due to Dr. Khairi Obaid Al-Zubaidi, Editor in Chief, AWEJ, without whose support, these proceedings would not have been possible.

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The Effectiveness of M-reader in Promoting Extensive Reading among Arab EFL Learners

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Abstract
Extensive reading (ER) is extremely important for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners as it helps them build vocabulary and develop their reading comprehension skills. However, engaging Arab EFL learners in ER might be a very difficult task especially when they lack motivation and enthusiasm. Therefore, the current study explores the effects of online ER tools such as M-reader on Arab EFL learners’ motivation to read extensively and autonomously. M-reader is a free online tool which helps educational institutions to manage extensive reading. It supports students to read and understand graded readers by taking online quizzes which are available in its database. The study was conducted on first year college students enrolled in the General Foundation Programme at a private college in Oman where M-reader was introduced for the first time. The study attempted to identify how M-reader motivates Arab EFL learners for extensive reading and how it motivates them to become autonomous learners. To gauge the efficacy of M-reader and to identify the extent to which it has been successful with the selected sample, reading records from M-reader, student participations through questionnaires, focus interviews with top readers, and samples of motivational strategies used by the researcher were collected and analyzed. Findings revealed the learners’ attitudes towards using M-reader as well as the discrepancies in feedback on whether they have developed an autonomous reading culture following exposure to M-reader.

Keywords: Arab EFL learners, extensive reading, General Foundation Programme, learner autonomy, M-reader

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1. Introduction

A number of scholars believe that the Arab countries including Oman largely lack the culture of reading in English as well as Arabic (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016; Bell 2001). Similarly, Al Yacoub (2012 as cited in Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2016) claims that there is a very huge disparity between the Arab and the European children in terms of the minutes spent on reading every year. While the European child spends an average of 12,000 minutes on reading, the average Arab child, too sad to say, reads for only 6 minutes per year. The lack of reading culture among Arabs in general can be attributed to several factors including “ late arrival of formal education systems”, “lack of libraries”, “ a strong oral culture”, “Arabic diglossic nature”, “high rates of adult illiteracy”, “social instability, and “traditional teaching methods” which mainly focus on “memorizations and recitation” (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016, p. 6).

Similar to the other Arab nations, Omanis, who are the focus of this study, do not appreciate reading either in English or Arabic. This, according to Al-Musalli (2014), is due to several factors such as lack of libraries, high illiteracy rates among adults and parents, and the excessive homework and assignments done at home.

Erguvan (2016) adds that the lack of enthusiasm among Arabs to read is reflected in the ELT classes as the Arab children who join schools have an impression that reading is more of an “academic arduous task” which is “disconnected from the verbal reality of their world” (p. 139). Likewise, in a study conducted by Al Siyabi and Al Rashdi (2016) on 300 students in public schools in Al Dhakhilya Government in Oman, it was found that the frequency of reading among students is low since only 53% read once a semester and they limit their selection of reading to one genre. The study also revealed that same reading materials were chosen by the teachers regardless of their students’ proficiency levels. As stated by (Al-Mahrooqi, 2010), Omani learners lack motivation to do extensive reading “because they connect all kinds of reading with academic study” (p.28). In addition, the situation does not seem to improve for Omani first-year college students since reading still remains as their weakest English language skills (Cobb, 1999). In a further study conducted by Al Yaaqubi and Al-Mahrooqi (2013) on 66 Omani university students majoring in English, it was found that a large number of participants (36%) read an average of one book and a half every semester while around 20% of them did not even read any book during the same period of time. Bani Orabah (2015) associates the Omani learners’ poor reading skills in English to their poor reading skills in Arabic. He argues that they can solve the problems of reading in English if they can learn how to read adequately and properly in English.

It addition, based on the author’s own experience with Omani learners, it can be said that they have very poor reading skills. In addition, they seem to lack motivation and enthusiasm to do extensive reading. In many cases, students say that they find reading to be the most boring skill.
They rarely read for pleasure unless they are awarded marks. The current study, therefore, attempts to explore the effects of using online extensive reading tools, namely the M-reader, on motivating Omani EFL learners to read and promoting a culture of reading among them.

2. Extensive reading

Extensive reading (ER) is defined by Bamford and Day (2003), as “an approach to language learning in which learners read a lot of easy material in the new language” (p.1). According to Grabe & Stoller (2002), extensive reading provides opportunities for the learners to get exposed to “large quantities of material within their linguistic competence, which is, at the same time, pleasurable”. (p. 259). Similarly, a widely accepted definition is given by Davis (1995) who summarizes the concept of extensive reading: ”pupils are given the time, encouragement and materials to read pleasurably, at their own level, as many books as they can, without the pressures of testing or marks” (p.329). Day & Bamford (2002) suggest 10 principles of extensive reading for students.

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is the role model of a reader.
(P.137-141).

The definitions and characteristics of ER given above agree on key elements which distinguish the process of extensive reading. Reading a lot of material which is easy and suitable to the learners’ own levels, with pleasure and enjoyment, without being worried about marks or tests, and under the supervision of teachers are the most important distinguishing characteristics of any ER programme.

A lot of studies have shown that ER has benefits in second language acquisition. For example, involving learners in ER activities increases their motivation (Day & Bamford, 1998; Takase, 2007), confidence (Arnold, 2009), and positive attitude towards reading in the target language (Leung, 2002). Similarly, other researchers such as Nation (1997) argue that ER improves the learners’ proficiency in all the language skills. In addition, extensive reading can help learners improve themselves as it is an activity that can be done individually by which learners have the freedom to read whatever they like and whenever they want (Usul, 2017). Nakanishi (2014) suggests that extensive reading should be made part of the language learning curriculum as it helps in improving the reading proficiency of students. Richards & Schmidt (2010) claim that ER develops good reading habits and vocabulary, and makes learners like reading. To add, Donaghy (2016) mentions seven benefits of ER for students which include gains in their reading
and writing competence, vocabulary growth, overall language competence, an increase in their motivation to learn, and more empathy and learner autonomy among them.

Furthermore, studies show a correlation between ER and learner autonomy. For instance, Sơn (2017) states that extensive reading has improved “learner autonomy, vocabulary learning, writing, and attitude towards reading” (p.18). Son also believes that extensive reading can enhance the autonomy among learners as they become free to choose reading books of their interests and feel more motivated to learn the language. Learner autonomy, which is viewed as “an attitude towards learning in which the learner is prepared to take, or does take, responsibility for his own learning” (Dickinson, 1995, p. 167) can be nurtured through ER programmes (Imrie, 2007).

In spite of the above mentioned benefits of ER, some researchers argue that implementing ER programmes has some problems including lack of reading materials, insufficient preparations of teachers, the teacher-centred views of learning, and lack of time for teachers as they face a great deal of pressure to complete the syllabus (Jacobs, 2002).

In addition, studies report that some teachers have shown two major concerns on the use of extensive reading. One concern expressed by them is pedagogical, that is, their ability to judge how thoroughly the students have read (Brown, 2012; Robb & Kano, 2013) and the other concern is related to the availability of time in class to organize extensive reading programmes (Day & Bamford, 1998). According to McBride & Milliner (2018), the use of online extensive reading tools such as M-reader offers solutions to some of the challenges mentioned above.

3. M-reader

M-reader (available at https://mreader.org):
Is a browser-based version of the Moodle Reader that was developed in Japan. It is supported by various graded reader publishers and is intended to be easy for administrators, teachers, and students to use. The site can be used free of charge by any legitimate educational institution (para 1).

M-reader supports educational institutions including schools and universities planning to manage ER in a more effective way. It allows students to take short timed quizzes with 10 random questions drawn from a question bank of 20-30 items in order to give each student an opportunity to answer different set of questions. The questions are multiple choice of three types: “who said this?”, “true/false”, and “event ordering” (Mcbride & Milliner, 2018). M-reader allows teachers to control the frequency of quizzes taken by students and increase/decrease the level of difficulty they may take a quiz on (para 2 &3). M-reader uses the ‘Kyoto Scale’ to equate the reading levels of books from various publishers. This scale places books and graded readers in terms of difficulty on a 10-point level starting from 0 to level 9 (“Kyoto Scale M-reader", n.d.) In M-reader, the reading goal is set as the number of words rather than the number of books. There are around 6000 quizzes available on M-reader which test the reader’s understanding of the plots and characters rather than the memory of specific information of the book (McBride & Milliner, 2018; Ishimaki, K. & Milliner, 2017). The number of books, their titles and levels, and the number of words read are recorded in the database making it more convenient for both the students and teachers to track this information. As illustrated in Figure 1, teachers can monitor their students’ reading progress.
The research on M-reader confirms its effectiveness in supporting ER. For instance, McBride and Milliner (2018) recommend M-reader as they find it to be an effective tool for both teachers and students. They add that M-reader allows teachers “to manage graded reader activity effectively in terms of logistics and pedagogical principles” (p.104). Similarly, Allan (2014) finds M-reader to be “affordable”, “accessible”, and “motivational (para.4). Although Campbell (2012) agrees that M-reader allows teachers to easily access their students’ extensive reading activities outside the classroom, he argues that several complaints have been reported by his students such as “website freezing or slowing down, finding books with available quizzes on Moodle Reader [M-reader], a confusing graded reader level chart, and not being able to take more than one quiz per day” (p. 102). In addition, students cheating, that is, a student colluding or trying to answer quizzes on behalf of another, is one of the major concerns raised by teachers as stated by Ishimaki & Milliner (2017).

Based on the author’s experience with M-reader, it can be said that the programme requires minimal technical efforts by both students and teachers. It has a user-friendly interface and encourages students to use it anywhere and anytime. Students can take quizzes, after selecting the suitable grader readers, in class, in the lab, or even at home through their mobiles or laptops. However, if not properly monitored by teachers, possibilities of cheating the system might become very high among students who might take the quizzes on behalf of each other. Please visit the M-reader website at (https://mreader.org) to know more details.

4. The research site

The current study was conducted on Omani learners enrolled in the General Foundation Programme (GFP) offered at Middle East College (MEC), in the Sultanate of Oman. The GFP is a one-year trimester preparatory programme designed for freshmen students who join institutions of higher education in Oman. It aims at helping students equip the skills and knowledge necessary to perform competently in their academic programmes. On successful completion of the GFP, students are expected to attain the required degree of proficiency in four major components, namely, English language, Mathematics, Computing, and Study Skills. The English component of the MEC GFP comprises three levels of 14 weeks each. Each level of English consists of three modules or skills: Writing Skills, Reading Skills, Listening and Speaking Skills. In addition, one module named Basic Study Skills is offered separately in level 1, while in the other two levels
study skills are incorporated in the curriculum. All students willing to join the college set for a Placement Test which determines the levels in which they are placed. Students could qualify for different levels in English language, Mathematics, and Computing depending on their level of proficiency ("Centre for Foundation Studies", n.d.). Students are assessed using a combination of summative and formative assessments. Assessments are in the form of mid-term exams and end-semester exams as well as continuous assessments (in projects, oral presentation, portfolios, and extensive reading). Since the focus of the current study is on extensive reading, the author will give a brief explanation on how this component is assessed at the research site.

Before M-reader was formally introduced in the GFP, students were asked to select at least one graded reader from the college library, read it, and give an assessed oral summary in front of their teachers. The process was very tedious as the teacher had to listen to a large number of students giving a presentation in the same monotonous way. In addition, there was no guarantee that the students had fully comprehended the stories they had read. In many cases, students used to read the summary given at the back cover of the graded readers or read its Arabic translated version. In addition, each student could read, on average, one story in a semester. A lot of students did not seem to be motivated to read. Unfortunately, the ultimate goal of extensive reading was not met in many cases. For this, there was an urgent need to look for a more effective method that promotes extensive reading among students and motivates them to read more frequently. M-reader was first introduced in the MEC GFP in Fall 2017. To register the institution on M-reader, the author contacted Dr. Tom Robb, the developer of the site, who gave him the authorization with administrative features to configure all the students and teachers. Target word counts and the reading difficulty levels were set for each GFP level. M-reader is flexible in such a way that students can read books at the same level set for them, one level below, or one level above. Table 1 explains the target word counts and the reading difficulty levels set by the author for each level.

Table 1. Target word count mapped against the reading difficulty level in Fall 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Goal Actual reading level (as set by the author)</th>
<th>Ability to read levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>3000 words</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>6000 words</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>9000 words</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Research questions
1. How does M-reader motivate Arab EFL learners for extensive reading?
2. How does M-Reader motivate Arab EFL learners to be autonomous readers?
3. What are the learners’ perceptions of M-reader as online extensive reading tool?
4. To what extent has the use of M Reader been successful in changing the learners’ reading attitudes?

6. Methodology
6.1. Research design
To answer the research questions, a mixed methods approach was used in collecting and analyzing data which included both quantitative and qualitative methods. As for the quantitative methods, records of the students’ reading performance were retrieved from M-reader’s database. The records included the number of words read, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the target words, and the number of quizzes taken throughout one academic semester, namely, Fall 2017. Additionally, the students’ perceptions of M-reader were collected through an online questionnaire. To motivate students to actively use M-reader and to develop a competitive spirit among them, lists of top readers were announced publicly. As for the qualitative methods, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three of the top readers.

6.2. Participants
Participants of this study were 725 students enrolled in the GFP in Fall 2017. The largest number of students was in level 1 of the programme with a total of 402 (55.4%), students in level 2 were 121 (16.7%) while 202 students were in level 3 (27.9%).

However, the number of participants who answered the online questionnaire drastically went down. Only 431 students of all levels (59.4%) responded to the questionnaire. This could be due to the fact that by the time the questionnaire was administered to the students, it was already towards the end of the semester and students were busy doing their end-semester exams.

7. Findings and discussion
In this section, findings of the study will be discussed. The findings are interpreted to answer the research questions as follows.

7.1. The impact of M-reader on students’ motivation
As explained in figures 2, 3, and 4, the majority of students (56.99%, 68.48%, and 50.77% respectively) said that M-reader had motivated them to read more. In Figure 2, 56.99% of the students agreed that they have enjoyed doing M-reader quizzes and they were motivated to read.

![Figure 2. Students’ responses to the question on M-reader and motivation](image)
Moreover, as shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of students (68.48%) said that their level of motivation increased when seeing their school summary (which includes the number of words they have successfully read) shown on their M-reader page.

![Graph showing student responses](image1)

**Figure 3. Students’ responses to the question on reading records and motivation**

To motivate students to actively use M-reader and to develop a competitive spirit among them, lists of top readers with their levels, sessions, and word counts were announced publicly through e-mails (to all GFP students). Short videos containing lists of top readers were also shown on the department plasma TV on a weekly basis. The students’ reading behavior was monitored before and after such announcements were made. A total of 4 videos were created and shown to serve the purpose mentioned above. The videos were shown in weeks 4, 5, 6, and 7 of the semester.

![Graph showing student viewpoints](image2)

**Figure 4. Students’ viewpoints of showing videos of top readers**
As illustrated in Figure 4 above, more than half of the respondents (50.77%) believed that the videos had a positive impact on their motivation. On the other hand, 32.82% gave a negative response and 16.41% had no idea. It could be that those respondents (49.23% put together) have not paid attention to the top reader announcements although each video was shown on the plasma TV for the whole week. Other factors related to competitiveness and jealousy among students could have contributed to their negative responses.

Nevertheless, the students’ reading behaviours across the three GFP levels showed improvement in the mid of the semester compared to the beginning and end of the semester as explained in figures 5, 6, and 7.

![Figure 5](image)

*Figure 5. The number of M-reader quizzes taken by level 1 students in Fall 2017*

Figure 5 shows the number of quizzes taken by level 1 students in the period from 8 October to 31 December 2017. All the quizzes taken by the students, whether passed or failed, were counted. As clearly shown, the students’ reading behaviour in the first 4 weeks of the semester (from 8 October to 8 November) was poor since they only took 60 quizzes. However, in the mid of the semester, particularly from 9 November to 9 December, students had the most active reading behaviour with a total of 497 quizzes taken. After the midterm, their reading behaviour began to decline until it became steady towards the end of the semester with a total number of 270 quizzes on 31 December 2017.

Similarly, level 2 students had a very slow start with 67 quizzes taken in the first 4 weeks of the semester. Their reading behaviour improved in the mid of the semester as reflected in the highest number of quizzes taken by them (155). However, they started becoming less active once again after the midterm exam, more precisely, from 10 December to 31 December with the least number of quizzes taken (42 only).
Likewise, it was a slow-paced beginning for level 3 students from 8 October to 8 November with a total of 55 quizzes as explained in Figure 7.

However, similar to level 1 and 2 students, the period from 9 November to 9 December was the most active for level 3 students as they took the highest number of quizzes (195). Their reading behaviour, on the other hand, started to decline immediately after the midterm exam with a total number of 134 quizzes though the number slightly went up once again towards the end of the semester with a total of 182 quizzes taken.

By looking at the GFP students’ reading behaviours in Fall 2017, the following findings can be summerised.
1. Students were active the most in the mid of the semester (weeks 5-9), from 9th November to 9th December.
2. Students were the least active in the first four weeks of the semester (8 October to November).
3. The students’ reading behaviour began to slow down after mid-semester (10 December to 20 December).
4. Towards the end of the semester (from 21 December until 31 December) their reading behavior reached a plateau except for level 3 students who showed some improvement.

There are several factors which could have contributed to the active reading behaviour of students in the mid of the semester. First, more graded readers were purchased on 23 November. The college library was enriched with 217 new graded readers. Thus, students were able to read more. Second, some motivational strategies were adopted. For instance, weekly e-mails on top readers were sent to the department faculty members and students. In addition, the videos were shown on the department plasma TV. By tracing the dates of these videos, it was found that they were shown to students in the period from 29 October until 27 November. The videos also included some motivational expressions and sentences. As discussed above, it was found that the most active reading behaviour of the students was from 9 November to 9 December. This could be due to the impact of watching these videos during the said period of time. However, once no more videos after week 7, it was noticed the students’ reading behaviour started slowing down as explained above.

On the other hand, some other factors might have negatively affected the students’ reading behaviour. To start with, there was a limited number of books available in the library, particularly for levels 1 and 2, as compared to the number of registered students. At the beginning of the semester, 523 books were available in the library for 725 students (ratio of 5:7). As a result, most of the sessions of levels 1 and 2 could not start on time. There was a delay of 5 weeks until the new graded readers were received. The findings indicate that students have become more active in taking quizzes towards the mid of the semester and this was the time these books were purchased. Therefore, there is a good reason to believe that increasing the book supply could have encouraged students to start reading. In addition, M-reader was introduced for the first time. Since little orientation was given on M-reader, both teachers and students needed more sufficient time to digest the programme. This has made some teachers reluctant to start M-reader with their students. As also indicated above, the students’ reading behaviour became less active in the last quarter of the semester. The reason for this could be attributed to the fact that students were preparing for the end-semester exams.
The screenshot shown in Figure 8 is an example of one of the e-mails sent to all GFP students by which the names of the top readers, their levels, sessions, and the number of words read were mentioned. It also included an attached video containing the same information. In addition, to motivate students, the videos also included some motivational expressions and phrases as illustrated in the screenshots given in Figure 9 below.

Table 2 shows the top readers of each level. Interestingly, a level 1 student was listed as the top reader with a total of 292,671 words read by the end of the semester. This student was highly motivated and had a positive impact on her classmates.

Table 2. List of top readers of each level and the total words they have read

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target words set for the level</th>
<th>Number of words read</th>
<th>Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3000</td>
<td>292,671</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6000</td>
<td>232,906</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9000</td>
<td>30,036</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a personal interview with the top reader and when asked about the most interesting thing about M-reader, she responded that “M-reader give[s] us the chance to compete not only at college level but also at global level” (Personal communication, February 18, 2018). She also mentioned three main reasons that motivated her to continue reading “First I like the M-reader and reading. Second, I want to learn English and this is the best and easier [easiest] way to learn any language. Third, I want to be the top reader”.

Another top reader shared similar views on his experience with M-reader. However, he stated that he was more interested in developing new vocabulary more than the number of words.

“Actually I am not interesting [interested] about the words. I only want to ...err... to get the benefits of reading...so that makes me read a lot. I am not interesting [interested] about how many words I have read” (personal communication, February 25, 2018).

When asked about the impact of weekly top readers list and videos, the third top reader confirmed its impact on motivating her to read. She said “when I see this [weekly videos] I waitng this list. When I read I see my name, I support [not clear] more time I read more stories” (Personal communication, February 19, 2018).

To conclude this section, findings indicate that M-reader has been a motivating factor for students to read more especially when they pass the quizzes and increase their word count. This is in line with the claims of some researchers that M-reader increases motivation among students when they pass quizzes (Curtis, 2015) as these quizzes “seemed to boost the self-efficacy of a number of students” (Robb, 2015, p. 149). In addition, there seems to be a correlation between high levels of motivation and improvement in the students’ reading behaviour as discussed above. It was found that when students were highly motivated during the mid of the semester due to factors related to passing quizzes, encouragement through e-mails, videos, and top reader lists top and availability of books, the students’ reading behaviour was the most active. However, findings indicate that the students’ motivation started to decline after the mid-of the semester. According to (Gheetham, Harper, Melody & Ito, 2016), “maintaining motivation over an extended period of time is difficult as many factors can influence the learning process” (p. 14).

### 7.2. Completion of the reading goals

In this section, the author will discuss the reading behaviour of students in terms of completion of the reading goals set for each level. Specific word counts were given for each level as follows: 3000 words for level 1, 6000 words for level 2, and 9000 words for level 3 respectively.
As explained in Figure 10 above, the majority of students (67%) exceeded the word count set for them and continued reading. On the other hand, 15% did not read at all while 17% read less than 3000 words. Likewise, a 65% of level 2 students have exceeded the goal compared to 23% who have not read anything. 12% failed to reach the goal.

Figure 10. Percentage of level 1 students completing the reading goal

Figure 11. Percentage of level 2 students completing the reading goal
Unlike level 1 and 2 students, the majority of level 3 students failed to achieve the reading goal. Only 35% of the students exceeded the word count set for them. Level 3 students seemed to be less motivated than students of the other two levels. A reasonable explanation could be that those students are at the exit level of the GFP. Therefore, by the time they have reached level 3, they might have lost enthusiasm and might have become more careless to learn English at this level. Oppositely, findings indicate that students of levels 1 and 2 were more motivated. This was also reflected in the number of quizzes taken by the students of these two levels.

7.3. Learner autonomy

Findings showed some success of M-reader in enhancing the learner autonomy among students. M-reader has provided a platform which promotes learner autonomy among the students. It was left for the students to make their own decisions in terms of selecting what to read, when to read, and when to take the quiz. Students were given the freedom to take the quizzes whether in the class or at home with minimal interventions from the teachers. The teachers’ role was more on giving guidance and monitoring their students’ reading progress. The type of support mainly given by teachers was technical (i.e. helping students retrieve their forgotten passwords) and motivational. This was reflected in the students’ responses to the question on how enthusiastic and supportive their teachers were. As explained in Figure 13 below, 68.88% of the students believed that their teachers were enthusiastic about M-reader and that they kept encouraging them to continue reading.
The findings seem to agree with the claims of the developer of M-reader, Dr. Tom Robb that M-reader supports learner autonomy among students “as it places part of their learning in their own hands:

1) They decide what they want to read
2) They decide whether the reading material is at a suitable level for them.
3) They decide when to read.
4) It is up to the student to decide how much to read beyond the minimum requirement set by the teacher.
5) The ‘gamification’ elements such as the leaderboard, progress part and level promotion challenge the students to keep going.
6) The ‘gamification’ elements also encourage competition among students.

(Personal communication, April 19, 2018)

However, giving full accountability to students could lead to issues of colluding and cheating. There were some cases were students took quizzes on behalf of each other through exchanging their passwords. As a result, it was decided at a later stage not to give full freedom for the students in using M-reader. Students were not allowed to take the quizzes at home and their passwords were constantly changed by their teachers to reduce possibilities of cheating as much as possible.

7.4. Students’ written perceptions

This section will discuss the written responses of students where they have given their suggestions and comments on M-reader. Table 3 below summarises the written comments given by the students.
Table 3. *Types of students’ comments and their percentage*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of comment</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you/ no comments</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear comments</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues with books</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some doubts about the effectiveness of M-reader (i.e. cheating)</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows samples of the students’ comments on M-reader. Some of the comments were translated into English to serve the purpose of the study.

Table 4. *Samples of students’ open-ended comments and suggestions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of comment</th>
<th>Samples taken from students’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Positive                                             | - “It is easy, interesting and motivating”.  
- “I like M-reader and there are no negative in this programme”.                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Negative                                             | - “It is a very difficult programme”  
- “It is very complicated especially for part time students”.  
- “First, sometime the stories we pick is above our level, it written in the story that it is level 2, but when we check it in the M-reader it shows that it is level 3 or 4 which we can't do a quiz on it. Second, some stories are hard to understand. For example, the adventure of Tom Sawyer. This story I read it and while Im reading I couldn't link the events together, it language is hard. Thats all. Thanks for reading my comment.” |
### Thank you/no comments

- “No comments thank you”

### Suggestions

- Rules of taking M-reader quizzes should be made stricter. The quiz should be under the teacher’s supervision. I would also like to draw the attention of the M-reader administrators that they should check the credibility of the marks obtained by the students (translated by the author).

- “I have problems with the stories borrowed from the library. Please provide electronic copies”.

### Unclear comments

- Why do we have to wait 10 days between quizzes? (translated by the author)

Note: The time set for students to wait until they could take another quiz was 36 hours and not 10 days.

### Issues with the availability of books/graded readers

- “Please bring more stories”.

- Increase the number of books in the library (translated by the author)

### Some doubts about the effectiveness of M-reader (i.e. cheating)

- Some students read big stories with a difficulty level higher than their actual level (level 1)

How can they answer the answer the questions (pass the quizzes)? (Translated by the author)

---

### 7.5 Concerns about M-reader

Based on the author’s own experience with M-reader as well as concerns raised by students and teachers, the following issues have been observed.

1. The number of books available in the library was insufficient. As mentioned earlier, 523 books were available in the library for 725 students. This was one of the major problems for students who found difficulties in finding books suitable to their reading level. This explains the slow-paced beginning with M-reader as the majority of the students could start reading only after 5 weeks of its implementation in Fall 2017. 65.13% of students expressed their disappointment with the limited number of books, which according to them, was a hindrance to continue reading. In addition, there were many books in the library which had no quizzes available on M-reader.

2. Incidents of cheating were observed. Some students attempted to answer quizzes on behalf of others after exchanging their passwords.
3. Some technical issues were also noticed. The most frequently recurring problems were with students and teachers forgetting their M-reader passwords.
4. Some teachers lacked enthusiasm and seemed reluctant to use M-reader. It was observed that sessions whose teachers did not give enough motivation and encouragement had high numbers of students not taking the quizzes regularly.

8. Conclusion
The purpose of the study was to explore the effectiveness of M-reader in motivating Arab EFL learners for extensive reading as well as enhancing their learner autonomy. Their perceptions of M-reader were also collected through an online questionnaire.

Findings of the study revealed that M-reader was effective in motivating students to do extensive reading. It was also found that the motivational strategies adopted by the author had a positive impact on the students’ attitudes towards reading and the use of M-reader. In addition, limited number of books, lack of teachers’ motivation and guidance, and technical issues were some factors which could have affected the students’ reading behaviour. Although there is no way to directly measure ‘learner autonomy (Tom Robb, personal communication, April 19, 2018), findings provide good reasons to argue that M-reader helps promote autonomous learning among students. To add, out of the 10 extensive reading principles suggested by Day and Bamford (2002), it can be said that ‘reading for pleasure, freedom of selecting the reading material, reading as much as possible, reading being its own reward, reading easy material, and orientation and guidance by teachers are strongly associated with M-reader.

9. Limitations of the study
Although this study revealed significant findings, the limitations below need to be addressed in future studies.
1. Pilot study before implementation was not conducted.
2. There seems to be lack of technical expertise among some teachers.
3. There was limited number of books in the library.
4. Only 59.4% students responded to the online questionnaire.
5. Preventive measures to control malpractice were not taken.
6. There was a focus on the number of words and developing a reading culture rather than other sub-skills such as vocabulary enrichment.
7. Teachers’ perceptions were not collected.
8. No in-depth interviews were conducted with students who failed to meet the reading goals.

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Role of Guest Lecturer in Research Proposal Writing: Students’ Perception

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Abstract
The present research focuses on the experience of undergraduate students in a Middle Eastern college on attending guest lectures at the initial stage of preparing their dissertation. Here an attempt to apply the constructivist approach (Kirshner et al., 2006; Westwood, 2008) to teaching the subject of English Research Methods (ERM) is made by using a technique of multiple guest lecturer sessions by the department working in different areas of linguistics to familiarize the students with research interests of their tutors. This paper is an attempt to find out students’ attitude to the sessions, their (sessions) benefits and drawbacks. Students’ feedback was collected at the end of each session to identify advantages/disadvantages and extent of helpfulness of the practice through a questionnaire. The data was analysed with the help of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results of the survey demonstrated the importance of guest speaker presentations for project writing as well as their (guest speakers’) positive impact on students’ motivation. Moreover, they helped to identify both the preferred and dispreferred approaches to conducting the sessions that are related to students’ personal attributes. See the comments

Key words: guest lecture, research methods, social constructivism, students’ perception

1. Introduction

Students’ perception of in-class activities suggested by the tutor is always important for an educator. It is one of the strongest motivational factors impacting performance of both the students and the lecturer. Nowadays, in the era of emerging new teaching strategies and approaches, the lecturers have a huge variety of tools in their hands to create an engaging and motivating learning environment in the classroom. Most of the skills-based modules have a good scope of implementing innovative approaches and experimenting to improve perception of students. Research methods is the area where the use of new approaches is not that widespread. It happens mostly due to the nature of the course and mode of its delivery. Those who teach the module could feel frustrated about its perception by the students as unfavourable (Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012). Many tried different ways of making it more attractive. The present paper is an attempt to shed light on students’ perception of one of the approaches to teaching research methodology which is a guest speaker session. Inviting a guest speaker to our classrooms became a widespread practice that adds to the educational experience of the students and exposes them to the research world of a particular discipline. Hence, this research provides an insight into the attitude of students to it and helps to identify student friendly and enriching mode of conducting guest sessions for students in the Gulf region.

2. Literature review

‘Guest speaker event can provide a means to supplement teaching to expose students to recent trends … and practices (Kamoun & Selim, 2007, p. 82). Having an invited talk by an expert in the field in your classroom is one of the ways tutor can improve learners’ perception of a module. Moreover, it gives students a chance to establish a relation between their knowledge and its application in the context of research. There are numerous benefits of a guest lecture. Treated as an effective teaching strategy it is in the first place a way to promote student-to-tutor communication (Clarke & Flaherty, 2002; Costello, 2012) and increase the level of active learning (Barraket, 2005; Fallon, Walsh, & Pendergast, 2013).

Guest sessions can considerably improve learning environment (Murray & Bollinger, 2001). Active learning is a focus of today’s education and teaching research methodology is not an exception. Learning through experience and reflection enhances students’ comprehension of a subject matter and makes it possible to apply the obtained skills and knowledge in the real world. Independent learners are ‘encouraged to directly involve themselves in the experience, and then to reflect on their experiences using analytic skills, in order that they gain a better understanding of the new knowledge and retain the information for a longer time’ (Moon, 2004, p.123). Described as a module usually taught in a traditional way, using the instructivist approach, often regarded to as boring or disengaging (Leston-Bandeira, 2013) English Research Methods (ERM) could equally be a platform for active autonomous learning if the tutor is ready to a meaningful change to the strategies an approaches used in the classroom (Healey, 2014; Manning, et al. 2006; Pfeffer & Rogalin, 2012; Sizemore & Lewandowsky, 2009). This arises from the of constructivist approach to learning suggested by Lev Vygotsky (1962). It is grounded in a difference between active and passive learning with consideration of a variety of students attributes and attitudes to acquiring skills and knowledge.
Followers of Vygotsky suggest to give students freedom in taking individual decisions about their learning strategies (as cited in Gibbs, 1992). One of such opportunities is incorporating guest speaker sessions into the learning process. This type of approach falls under the category of social constructivism as opposed to cognitive subtype. Cognitive constructivism is based on interaction between students and their environment whereas social constructivism is based on learning through interaction with the teacher and other students that results in particular knowledge acquisition (Vygotsky, 1962). According to Barraket (2005) promoting tutor to student communication creates a motivating social environment for learning. Guest speaker session is one of the ways to apply social constructivism approach in teaching students research methodology. It enables students’ familiarisation not just with the faculty research focus (which could be done through a concerned staff paper reading and discussion) but, what is more important, live communication with a researcher and an opportunity to get answers to their questions on the spot. Any social experience provokes an individual reaction and educational environment is not an exception. Perception is considered to be an outcome of social experience (Alebaikan, 2017; Covey, 1989). However, the question is if our students perceive the suggested activity of a guest talk and discussion the way we expect them to. The reasons of particular students’ perception of a specific teaching activity or a course as a whole can be different. Researchers in education suggest three that are considered to be the most influential ones: students’ attributes, their attitude and teaching strategies.

Individual students’ attributes comprise of a variety of characteristics. They range from personal ones like age and gender to social like culture and religion (Sizemore & Lewandowsky, 2009). Having strong attributes related to their personal background considerably impacts students’ perception of different activities. For example, being encouraged to engage into a conversation with a male tutor could cause a negative reaction of a female Muslim student as well as being requested to develop an argument proving her personal opinion in front of a mixed gender classroom. One of the advantages of having multiple guest sessions was the ability to choose speakers of both genders to enable ease students’ participation. Another was definitely inviting department lecturers who are well known to the students that helped to avoid uneasiness of interacting with a stranger.

Students’ attitude is an extremely powerful factor that is usually driven by a number of the above mentioned attributes. The attitude of being either a dependent or an independent learner is often a result of overlapping personal and cultural factors that encourage or discourage active participation in discussions and debates, sharing opinions or providing arguments (Healey, 2014). Guest speaker’s session of suggested format is carefully designed for all the types of students ensuring the benefit of each: independent learners are free to satisfy their inquisitive minds by asking questions following guest’s talk as well as to demonstrate their knowledge answering speakers’ questions while dependent ones can learn simply by paying attention to the on-going activity. Of course the most important benefit of social constructivism-based activity is interaction but interference of a traditional culture, such as that of Oman, needs to be carefully addressed. It is especially important in case of a multicultural classroom where representatives of other backgrounds who do not have any barriers in communication can easily and of course unknowingly benefit others.
Choosing a teaching approach is a matter today’s researchers in education argue about a lot. Their usefulness is measured and considered in application to a variety of disciplines. Instructivists stress the importance of staying in their comfort zone provided by the lecturing mode. Their load is minimized due to the passive role of the students who do not engage in any of the in-class activities that would require additional effort or attention of the tutor (Porcaro, 2010; Westwood, 2008). Moreover, they prefer to follow well-structured notes they prepare in advance based on the concepts and content of their choice (Heath, 2014). Constructivists prefer to give freedom of choice to their students expecting them to demonstrate skills and abilities of an independent learner taking their own decisions and responsibilities in and for the whole process of studies (Gibbs, 1992), as well as developing their critical thinking skills (Heath, 2014).

Knowing these the tutor can find a perfect balance to satisfy students’ needs and address their specific demands (cultural, personal and professional) in order to engage students in an activity that would be perceived positively.

3. Research focus and discussion
The idea of a guest lecturer is usually associated with an expert outsider coming to your class to lecture on a specific topic (Alebaikan, 2016). In this particular case it was decided to use internal resources of the department. There were four reasons for doing so. First of all, it was an opportunity for the students to learn more about their lecturers’ research expertise. They (students) see us (tutors) as representatives of a subject we teach them in class. So students’ knowledge regarding tutors’ background is incomplete in terms of the area of research staff deal with. As a result there is lack of awareness of the help lecturers can extend to them. Secondly, at the end of the semester where ERM is taught students have to choose an academic supervisor for their final research project. Often they rely on personal attitude to a particular lecturer which is not always the best ground in the choice of the project supervisor. It is advisable to do that being well aware of the tutor’s expertise to ensure proper cooperation in the course of preparing the dissertation. The third reason is utilizing internal resources that are rich in a variety of aspects. Multicultural staff background can be very enriching for the students. Belonging to different linguistic schools of the world and having extensive knowledge in a number of language disciplines lecturers of the department are there to share their experience of working on a research paper with the novice in the field which BA English students are. Finally, inviting lecturers from within the department is cost saving whereas external experts would require the institution to pay for their services.

3.1 Research tools and respondents
The present research was conducted with a group of twenty students studying the module of ERM which is run once a year in the academic year 2016 – 2017. It should be noted that class attendance in terms of number and composition could vary from session to session.

The aim of the survey was identifying students’ perception of an invited lecturer impact in the context of research proposal writing.
Data were collected via a questionnaire of ten questions where nine were closed questions and one was an open ended question. The closed ended questions had a three scale evaluation where the type of the scale depended on the nature of the question.

The survey was administered immediately after the guest session that ensured comprehensive feedback of the students who attended the class.

### 3.2 Session schedule

Arrangement of the guest lecturer sessions was decided upon keeping several points in mind. The visits were scheduled between weeks 4 and 6. The reason of the decision laid in specific topics that were taught to the students in class. In particular, the focus was on finalising the choice of topic for their research proposal, identifying research questions and locating research sources.

There are two of ERM sessions per week, so guest speakers were invited to the class every other session to ensure that students acquire understanding of introduced concepts of research proposal writing and can relate them to the information shared by the guest speaker.

The number of speakers invited to the class was three. The initiative of identifying a particular lecturer to give a talk belonged to the module tutor in the first case and to the students in the other two cases. The group was given freedom in choosing a department member to share their experience to make participation more encouraging.

Each guest was allotted 30 minutes for a presentation for the students to stay focused throughout the session. Another 30 minutes following the presentation were given to a discussion in the question-and-answer format.

Guest speakers were free to choose any type of supporting materials like PPT slides, handouts or any other kind of visual aids as they are usually helpful in ensuring a better understanding of the material discussed in class.

The guests were briefed about the nature of the module, topics under current discussion as per the curriculum and expectations in terms of focus of their expected talk. They were requested to focus on the choice of the individual research topic, challenges that they faced working on their dissertation and their main achievements.

The host lecturer attended each of the guest sessions to introduce the guest and his work and provide support to both students and the guest if need be.

### 3.3 Mode of guest sessions delivery

Three guests were invited to do a guest talk in ERM class. Two of the guests were male and one was female. The names of the speakers as well as their research focus are not revealed in this paper to preserve their anonymity.

As the format was not discussed with the guest speakers each one of them chose a different approach to conducting the session.
The first session was a presentation supported by the power point slides and handouts. A variety of materials provided by the guest speaker helped students understand the nature of his research and form their queries about the topic. A distinctive feature of this session was direct interaction with the students. The speaker chose the format where the audience was encouraged to ask questions without waiting till the end of the session as well as they had to answer the questions asked by the speaker and share their experience. Moreover, the speaker successfully related real life examples with the linguistic research problems he worked on. The mode of the session encouraged active participation and strong interest in the material of the session.

The second speaker chose the mode of a lecture followed by a question-and-answer discussion. The lecture was not supported by any power point slides or handouts and so the students had to pay full attention to the speaker. Nevertheless, the interaction following the discussion was active and students asked questions eagerly. It might be assumed that as far as the group consisted of female students only they felt more comfortable with a female guest speaker.

The third guest suggested a discussion of one of his research papers chosen by the students. As the results of the survey showed later on the chosen format of the session was less encouraging for the audience than the ones of the previous two sessions. The students found the task of choosing a particular research paper by the lecturer and reading it in preparation for the discussion rather challenging. It is well known that students usually lack motivation to read outside the classroom. In addition the high standard of academic language of the research paper/papers suggested for reading as well as unfamiliar concepts could be discouraging for the students due to their complexity. Initial response was minimal and so the guest had to change his strategy and encouraged participation by asking research related questions to the group. The reason of a mismatch between the expectations of the guest and the students could be in the insufficient briefing of the speaker by the module tutor about the level of the students of the cohort.

Student’s perception of the impact of the guest speaker as the main focus of the current research would help the module tutor to take a decision regarding the need of planning other sessions. Although the cohort of the students taking the module would be different in the next academic year, the feedback provided by the current group could be considered as an average opinion of a typical representative of the group. This would also assist the lecturer in scheduling the sessions, choosing the speakers and providing particular briefing to them to ensure the expectations of both the students and the guest are met and what is more important the sessions are relevant and helpful for the successful completion of the course.

3.4 Survey focus and background

The current research focused on specific points where the opinion of the students was surveyed to identify benefits of the three conducted guest sessions as well as their impact on a personal level.

The students were surveyed in the first place on the relevancy of the provided information. The relevancy was considered especially in terms of its relation to the part of the syllabus content of the module they were studying at that particular time (Weeks 4 - 6). Guest speakers were accordingly requested to focus on the choice of the topic and the difficulties of identifying research.
questions they might have faced and possible solutions of the issues. Another point to be included in the session delivery was the placement of the sources for reading and the approach to working with them.

Another point in assessing the guest speaker’s session was its helpfulness. The overall impression of the students on the input of the presented information was of interest here. No particular topic focus was presumed in this particular case. The gathered feedback would be based on the general effect of both, the focused part of the session and the discussion following it.

*Ability to engage with the audience* as one of the survey items would provide the module tutor an insight into students’ impression on a variety of techniques used by a guest speaker in their ability to raise the interest and level of involvement of students into the activity.

*Choice of an individual research topic* was one of the tasks students worked on during the time of the guest speakers’ visits. Due to this the respondents were surveyed on the helpfulness of the session in this as it is always considered to be one of the most difficult tasks to accomplish. Students usually have doubts and consider several topics before making their final choice. Hence, guidance from the department on the approaches to taking this decision is valuable for the class.

*Clarity of the presentation* was given prominence to in the current research. The delivery of the session in terms of its quality matters for the group as it ensures proper understanding of presented concepts and later on motivates/demotivates participation in the discussion. Comprehension of the ideas of the speaker depends a lot on his way of presenting them, choice of language, speed of speech and other relevant factors.

*Usefulness of the presented information* was one of the aspects the students assessed the sessions of the guest speakers on. This was related to the topics discussed in class as one of the aims of the sessions was to assist the students with particular tasks. The guests had to plan their session accordingly to ensure reaching the set goal.

*Novelty of the information* was expected in each of the guest sessions to enable, apart from communication, learning through interaction with the tutor.

*Helpfulness of the session supporting materials* was selected as one of the survey items as nowadays we as tutors are highly recommended to provide visual aids to our students to enable better understanding of the taught material and sometimes improve their involvement into the related activities. Modern classroom equipped with the Internet access, Power Point Projectors, interactive boards and other technologically innovative tools and devices is encouraging for today’s tutor and provides them with many opportunities.

Another survey focus was students’ perception of the level of *motivation of the speaker*. The idea behind this was identifying how encouraging the speakers were presenting their research. It is well known that motivational speakers always have a greater effect on the audience and students are not an exception. The more engaging the guest is the more productive is further discussion and higher are the chances of the class to retain presented information in their long term memory.
Specific benefits of the session was the final research point. Here the students were requested to provide their comments on what each of the guest speakers taught them personally through his presentation. Our individual ways of understanding and processing information as well as benefiting from open discussions where you can participate actively or passively are different. That is the reason why every students’ personal opinion is of great value to the tutor.

3.5 Students’ feedback

There were two types of feedback elicited from students: general and specific.

3.5.1 General aspects of the guest sessions. The data discussed below was collected with the help of the questionnaire that was administered end of every guest session. Depending on the type of the asked question (closed or open question) the data was divided into two sections. The answers to the closed type of questions related to evaluation of guest lecture aspects selected by the tutor are presented in Table 1. The response to the open question regarding specific benefits that students identified personally is shown in Table 2.

Table 1 Feedback on selected aspects of guest speakers’ session

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Speaker 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Speaker 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Speaker 3</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Relevancy</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Helpfulness</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Topic choice</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Usefulness</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Novelty</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Supporting materials</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 demonstrates that nine elements of students perception of three guest sessions delivered by different members of the concerned department were evaluated on the scale of high, medium and low importance. The overall impression of the results is that students felt appreciative to the speakers for their contribution to their learning. The data shows that most of the options were rated between high and medium importance.

Relevancy of all the three sessions was rated between 83% - 100% that proves the appropriateness of the chosen topic for the current module and the timely scheduling of the invited talks. The feedback on helpfulness of the sessions demonstrated slightly lower results (66% - 92%) that might be due to students’ expectations that were not fully addressed by the guest speakers. 78% - 93% of the group felt highly engaged into the sessions in question while the rest rated their involvement into the activity as medium. The benefit of the session for the choice of an individual research topic ranged between 59% - 78%, 55% - 21% decided that they benefitted from the...
session to a medium extent and ... saw a low benefit in the 1st session. The cohort evaluation of the clarity of the speakers ranged between 77% - 86%. Others found the speakers medium clear due to students learning attributes that sometimes interfere with understanding of presented concepts. The difference between the ratings of the usefulness of the three speeches was quite high: whereas the 2nd and the 3rd speakers scored 85%, the 1st guest got only 55% of students saying that it was of highly useful. Opinions of others split between 28% of medium usefulness and 17% said it was of low use.

It is worth noticing that majority of the cohort considered the novelty of the information presented by all the three speakers as medium (see Table 1). It demonstrates that students have a substantial background in the discipline and are familiar with the concepts addressed by the guest speakers.

Supporting materials were rated the highest by 67% in case with the 1st speaker and the lowest in case of the third one (43%). The reason here might be the interference of students attributes, in particular lack of motivation to read as the session was planned as the speaker’s research paper based discussion that the group had to read before attending the guest’s talk. The second speaker was not rated as the lecturer did not use any supporting materials at all.

Majority of the students (72% - 100%) considered the guests highly motivational which means an overall positive response to the introduction of another practice in teaching. Some of them found the level of motivation medium and no one said that it was low.

All in all the obtained results clearly demonstrate students interest in the activity of communication with guest speakers as well as their appreciation of the experience the department exposed them to in preparation for their final stage of studies which is a research project.

3.5.2 Specific benefits of the guest sessions. The overview of the students’ responses demonstrated the effectiveness of guest speaker sessions by identifying fifteen different benefits that are provided in the Table below and arranged from the most to less often mentioned ones by the twenty two students of ERM group following three guest speaker sessions. Please note that each of the students could mention several benefits of the attended sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Frequency of identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Importance of reading</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Importance of time management</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Importance of research questions</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How to approach the process of Literature review writing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Importance of researcher’s own interest in the topic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How to choose a sample</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ethical issues</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ways to collect the data</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ways to start the research</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The top benefit of the guest sessions identified by the students was the importance of reading. Difficulty in motivating students to read is faced by the majority of tutors in the Arab World. The class involved into the current survey is not an exception. The outcome of the research clearly demonstrates that joint efforts of the department worked well here because the importance of reading is mentioned by the group among the most important points they learned from the session.

Any research is a time-consuming process. Therefore, each of the invited speakers stressed upon the need to design a personal schedule to ensure timely completion of the tasks every researcher is committed to in the process of working on either a proposal or a dissertation writing. The students appreciated this advice by mentioning it as the second most important benefit of the sessions.

Rated third among fifteen was the benefit related to research questions design. Students learned about the significance of correctly identifying research questions for obtaining desired results in their further work.

Benefit of being personally interested in one’s research topic was identified by the students after attending the sessions. Understanding the relationship between their own preferences and the project they plan to work on in the future gives the students an advantage of making the right choice at the initial stage of proposal writing where they look at the variety of research topic options.

Choosing a research sample was listed by the students among other benefits of the guest sessions they attended. They learnt how to identify the right group of respondents to satisfy the needs of the research and deal with difficulties that they can face working with the sample.

Learning about ethical issues was also given importance by the students. They found the information presented by the guest speakers in this regard novel and enriching, especially those planning to collect their research data from a particular age or gender sample.

A number of other benefits were mentioned once (see Table 2, item 8 - 15) among which are the steps of conducting research, approaches to data collection and the choice of the methods of analysis, need of structuring the tools of analysis around research questions, importance of critical thinking skills and use of academic language and of course overcoming difficulties arising from the research paper writing requirements.

4. Recommendations
The results of the conducted survey make it possible to provide the following recommendations in three different dimensions: recommendations to guest speakers, host lecturers, and students.

4.1 Recommendations to guest speakers
One of the most important recommendations to guest lecturers is understanding the needs and expectations of the host. If those are not considered carefully enough there is a danger of facing a barrier between the guest and the students. It can result in lack of the audience interest to the presentation and what is more – reluctance in participation in the planned discussion.

Guest speakers are also recommended to familiarise themselves with the module summary before delivering the session. Knowledge of the involved content as well as the students’ background in the subject are important points to be considered to ensure interest, participation and engagement of the audience of address.

It is also recommended to plan the structure of the session. The students are usually sensitive to the degree of preparation of a tutor for a particular lecture and guest speaker is not an exception. Negligence or overconfidence in this case can turn against the lecturer and response to the talk might be rather low. To avoid this it is recommended to prepare a thorough plan of the session one plan to conduct as a guest speaker.

It would be a good idea have a backup plan as sometimes our expectations of the audience are either higher or lower than our first plan talk in spite of being introduced to module content by the host lecturer. In both of the cases it can cause a misunderstanding between the students and the guest speaker. Therefore, to be responsive to the needs of the audience guest speaker could consider being ready for an on the spot change if needed.

It is advisable for a guest speaker to support their session with appropriate visual aids. According to the results of the conducted survey students highly appreciate the idea of being introduced to new concepts not only through verbal exposure but also through Power Point slides, handouts or any other kind of teaching aids. Using them helps to illustrate discussed material and improves students’ participation.

Being engaging is very important for a guest speaker. If you succeed in creating an atmosphere of interest student will definitely learn from your session. It is a particularly relevant recommendation for ERM as its complexity adds to lack of motivation in attending the sessions delivered by both host and guest lecturers and in the subject in general.

4.2 Recommendations to host lecturer
Host lecturer is in the first place recommended to discuss their and students’ expectations of the upcoming session with the invited speaker. To ensure that the audience benefits from the event organised on a particular purpose, the guest should be informed about the outcomes of the session in terms of enriching students’ knowledge.

Mode of the session delivery is another point to focus on. Host lecturer should be clear regarding their guest’s plan of how the required information will be presented to the audience. Knowing a particular cohort it is possible to choose the way that would appeal to the students
better than any other. The choice would impact the outcome of the session in either positive or a negative way depending on the ability of the host to identify the needs of the students.

Another recommendation to the host lecturer is holding a discussion of the content taught in class the time of the guest session. It is advisable to personally introduce the invited speaker to course structure as the expectations of the students would be primarily getting help on topic they currently working on. Focusing on a matter that is not relevant at this point of time could result in loss of focus of the class.

Guest speaker needs to be briefed about the level of the students. If the sessions are arranged internally, i.e. invited tutors are currently teaching the same cohort or taught them previously, the briefing does not require a lot of details as the department is familiar with the group. Alternatively, if the guest speaker is not part of the faculty, the briefing should be extensive to ensure the success of the session.

4.3 Recommendations to students

It is highly recommended for the students to attend guest speaker/lecturer sessions offered by the department. The sessions have a wide variety of advantages starting from expanding general background in linguistics and learning about staff research areas to obtaining answer to particular questions that are of students’ particular professional interest.

Moreover it is advisable to interact with the guest speaker in any suggested mode as the process of interaction enriches students’ experience in communication with peers and enables immediate acquiring of knowledge.

Finally, students are recommended to ask questions related to the linguistic area of their interest to clarify existing doubts about the choices and approaches to research at its early stage.

5. Conclusion

The present paper contributes to the investigation in the area of using guest lectures as a teaching strategy for undergraduate students in the Gulf region. It demonstrates specific benefits of guest led sessions for the students identified through their feedback. In addition, it helps in choosing the right ways of preparing and conducting those sessions in accordance with the needs of the audience.

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References


Challenges of Integrating Academic Sources in Assessed Assignments:  
A Case of Arab EFL Learners  

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Muscat, Oman  

Abstract  
Integration of academic sources is an essential component of academic writing. It adds authenticity to the work, indicates that the student has read extensively, and upholds academic integrity of the written piece. However, according to the author’s experience of teaching undergraduate level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, using academic sources and citing references effectively is one of the most daunting features of academic writing. Therefore, this study investigates the challenges faced by students in citing academic sources while composing research based reports and, by the same token, the reasons behind them. It also considers teachers’ observations about these challenges and the strategies that can be adopted to support students. A mixed method approach was used where data were collected through student questionnaires, student focus groups, interviews with faculty members, and students’ assignment reports. The participants included 97 undergraduate-level Engineering students enrolled in three sessions of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course called Communication Skills. The paper reports on the details of the research-based assignment and the measures used by the author to support students in integrating sources in the report. It was observed that the students found integration of academic sources as the most problematic requirements and features of the assignment. The data revealed that these challenges are direct consequences of students’ linguistic backgrounds; lack of appropriate writing skills; difficulty in comprehending articles due to the technical jargon used; and high word count of the academic papers. In response to that, the author strongly recommends the incorporation of academic literacies in the curricula of specialist courses as well as prompt, closer collaboration between language instructors and subject specialists. Though this study was limited to the students of a specific course, it is hoped that the findings will help other EFL and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) instructors apprehend the crux of the issue and devise effective strategies to overcome the above-mentioned challenge.  

Key words: academic sources; academic writing; source integration; English language Proficiency  

1. Introduction

Academic writing is of prime importance to tertiary level students, not only for the sake of mastering the English language as such but also to navigate successfully through other disciplines. Academic writing has a fundamental impact on learners’ progress (Leki & Carson, 1994) as it is considered to be a thinking tool which helps learners think critically while learning all the disciplines (Bjork & Raisanen, 1997).

Incorporation of academic sources is an essential component of academic writing. This means that students are required to support their arguments citing previous work done by other researchers of the field and “locate their claims within a disciplinary framework” (Luzon, 2015, p. 52). Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue (2010) assert that “writing from sources looms large” (p.178) in university assignments and from the first year itself, students are expected to engage in critical reading of academic sources and integrating them in writing.

The reasons why academics use these sources are that they are credible; written by experts of the field; examine a topic fairly; are peer-reviewed; and checked for accuracy. According to Neville (2008), referencing is an integral part of academic writing since it helps in building a “web of ideas… like a spider building its web with carefully engineered connections between ideas” (p.7) as it connects and spreads knowledge further. Students’ ability to use academic sources in their writing effectively is the key to academic success. However, the synthesis of academic sources with one’s own voice requires mastery over a complex set of literacy skills (Zhao, 2015).

Research and author’s own experience with EFL learners reveal that citing references is the most challenging aspect of academic writing for EFL learners (Hivela & Du, 2013).

Apparently, integration or incorporation of academic texts might appear to be a single task, a deeper analysis reveals that it comprises “processes that involve reading, understanding, learning, relating, planning, writing, revising, editing, and orchestrating” (Campbell, 1990, p. 211). An EFL learner grappling with the basic requirements of writing composition is more often than not baffled by these requirements and often complains that the task has Herculean dimensions. The limited knowledge of academic discourse functions (Abasi & Akbari, 2008) very often leads students to indulge in patchwriting which is categorized as plagiarism.

Howard (1995) defines patchwriting as “copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one synonym for another” (p. 233). He, however concedes that patchwriting is necessary and is an important aspect of the developmental needs of writing and not dishonesty. In concurrence with this, Pecorari (2003) states that “today’s patchwriter is tomorrow’s competent academic writer” (p.338). Whatever justification might be given, patchwriting still cannot be termed as proper academic writing and, hence, the issue of improper citation still pervades.

Most of the research conducted in this area has focused on citation practices of Master and PhD level students (Lamptey & Atta-Obeng, 2012; Davis, 2013; Pecorari, 2006) with, unfortunately, lesser attention being given to the undergraduate EFL learners’ source based writing (Luzon, 2015; Zhao & Hirvela, 2015). Some researchers have suggested the use of customized training to support students in source-based writing (Pecorari, 2008; Shi, 2010) where intensive
practice on summarizing, paraphrasing, citing and referencing should be given. However, there is little or no evidence on how such courses have actually benefitted learners and what the students’ and faculty perceptions of such a course.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to find out the challenges faced by undergraduate level Engineering students in integrating academic sources in their assessed assignment reports of Communication Skills course, capture the perceptions of students and faculty on the reasons behind these challenges, and provide some plausible solutions to tackle the issue at hand.

2. Literature review
A number of studies have looked at the EFL students’ source based writing and a predominant observation is that the writing produced by these students often comprises long text fragments which are either copied or poorly summarized (Pecorari, 2008). They are usually examples of patchwriting which comprise incorrect use of sources where students borrow from various sources but show inefficiency at weaving them together with their own voice. Due to this, students frequently encounter academic integrity violations (Shi, 2004). Therefore, a lot of researches on source integration probe into the issues of plagiarism (Liao & Tseng, 2010). However, this paper will not probe the issues related to plagiarism, though they are referred to, since the author believes that it is not blatant plagiarism on the students’ part. The author strongly supports that inappropriate use of sources does not in fact stem from the student’s intention to deceive but from the challenges she/he faces and the factors leading to them (Howard 1995, Pecorari 2003). Hirvela and Du (2013) engaged undergraduate level Chinese students in paraphrasing academic sources. They concluded that, “while the procedures involved in paraphrasing source text material may appear simple, the enactment of those procedures is a complex and often elusive experience for second language (L2) writers” (p.87). Howard et al. (2010) found out that both native and ESL students struggled to demonstrate the expected level of academic quality and indulged in patchwriting. Shi (2004) also discovered that students frequently encounter plagiarism issues due to their misuse of source material. Hence, this literature review primarily focuses on two areas of concern: (a) the challenges faced by undergraduate level students and (b) the reasons behind them.

A large number of studies have quoted the lack of required language proficiency (Neville, 2008; Plakans & Gebril, 2013) as the major reason behind the challenges of citing sources among L2 students. Lack of required language skills often steals students’ confidence in their writing Luzon (2015) analyzed a learner corpus carrying literature reviews of 35 third-year undergraduate level Spanish students. He found inappropriate source integration in most of the samples and quotes three main reasons which include: lack of awareness of the nature of academic texts; low level of academic literacy procedures which are required for paraphrasing and summarizing; and unfamiliarity with language of citations. Liao and Tseng (2010) also quoted similar reasons after conducting a study on ninety-five postgraduate and undergraduate students in Taiwan in which they involved students in paraphrasing and collected their perceptions through a questionnaire. The students stated that they were aware of the importance of paraphrasing and asserted that they had not committed any plagiarism offences. However, both undergraduate and postgraduate students were found to have committed plagiarism in the actual work. The authors believe that
this could have resulted due to inadequate, explicit instruction and practice in paraphrasing and the influence of Chinese citation practices. Moreover, they observed that the undergraduates faced more challenges due to limited cognitive development.

Although a recent study conducted by Jomaa & Bidin (2017) included doctoral students, the fact that the participants were Arab EFL students, the findings need a mention here. Interviews conducted with six male Arab students pursuing PhD in IT from a Malaysian university revealed that “challenges in citation included addressing the credibility of information in published sources, adopting a stance toward the citations, insufficient knowledge about using citations, and second language difficulties (p.177)”. In addition, confusion between academic writing conventions and the need to make their own points (Nevil, 2008; Jomaa & Bidin 2017) are also cited as major reasons behind the challenge.

Another key factor that needs attention is the poor time management and lack of planning from the students’ end (Harris, 2004). Integration of academic sources is a daunting and time consuming task and students usually miscalculate the hours required for developing a writing piece supported with a substantial amount of literature. Most of the students are procrastinators and usually start their assignments at the eleventh hour.

Lack of awareness on the importance of integration of academic sources in their work is also one of the important reasons behind students’ lack of interest in this task. Lamptey and Atta-Obeng (2010) report that “Students are under the mistaken impression that the only motive behind citing references is to avoid plagiarism and to earn good marks...only a requirement to show the titles of sources consulted in writing their papers (p.77).

An important observation made is that not many studies have collected student perceptions of the challenges concerning citation problems and the reasons behind them. A major concern raised by students is the inconsistencies among staff members (Angéll-Carter, 2000) in terms of their requirements regarding integration of sources which often leads to confusion among students. What is common knowledge to one tutor was not necessarily to another. Some tutors encourage personal opinions in assignments, whilst others do not (Neville, 2008). Another observation made by Lamptey and Atta Onbeng (2012) was that “faculty either took for granted that students knew how to properly cite or that faculty might be of the opinion that it was the responsibility of students to know how to cite correctly…” (p.77). However, Newton (1995) reports that students face these challenges due to their reliance on inappropriate source for instruction on how to reference. Approximately half the students she interviewed were aware that they are not on the right track but they hesitated going to the tutor and quite often sought help from inappropriate sources such as friends, parents or outdated handouts which mislead them. Thus, Newton’s conclusions prove supportive towards faculty members.

The review of existing literature indicates that lack of academic literacy skills in addition to low language proficiency, inconsistencies in requirements from faculty members, and lack of proper time management emerge as the major reasons behind the challenges faced by EFL students.
3. Research Questions
The main research questions guiding the study were:
• What are the challenges faced by students in integrating academic articles in their writing?
• What are the tutors’ observations about the way students cite references in their academic papers?
• What are reasons behind these challenges according to students and their tutors?
• What strategies can be adopted to support students?

4. Research Methodology
To get a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by the students in incorporating academic sources, the researcher used a mixed method approach by collecting data from both quantitative and qualitative instruments. This approach supported in triangulating the results yielded from different instruments; obtaining an unbiased understanding of the issue from various stakeholders; and gaining insights into various levels of analysis. The perceptions of students and the faculty members teaching the Communication Skills course were collected. Quantitative data were collected through a student questionnaire and qualitative data were collected through student focus group discussions and faculty interviews.

4.1. Context
The study was conducted at a private college with a student population of approximately 6,000. The institution offers undergraduate and post graduate level Engineering, Business and IT programs. The medium of instruction in all these disciplines is English. To enter the undergraduate programs, students are required to have a minimum score of 5.5 on the IELTS exam, otherwise, in order to acquire the required level of language proficiency, the students are required to take the Foundation program. The major objectives of the English component of the Foundation program are: developing English language and study skills; enhancing students’ ability to cope effectively in an academic context; providing academic preparation for higher learning; and motivating students to develop independent study skills. In addition to the Foundation program, students are enrolled in compulsory academic writing modules to provide continuous support during their tertiary level studies.

In the first semester of their bachelor course, students study a compulsory module called English for Special purposes (ESP) which is a pre-requisite to the Communication Skills module. ESP module orients students to research skills including data collection method, data analysis, locating relevant articles and drafting writing annotated bibliography. Communication Skills is a 100% coursework module where the students are assessed throughout the 15 week semester through assignments and quizzes with no final end of semester exam component.

The students are expected to complete most of the assignments by supporting their arguments with evidence from research. The first assignment was a group based assessment where the students were expected to solve a case on barriers related to communication. They were required to provide well-reasoned and responsible judgment, apply problem-solving technique to generate practical and creative solutions, provide evidence from literature, and present clear and coherent arguments demonstrating attention to writing conventions. For the second assignment, students were expected to research a topic, collect data through primary and secondary sources
and present their findings through a poster. The third assignment assessed students’ oral presentation and public speaking skills by engaging them in informed debates.

4.2. Participants

The participants chosen for this study were 97 undergraduate level Engineering (58.51%) and Computer Science (41.49%) students enrolled in three cohorts of Communication Skills module during Fall 2017 semester. The sample comprised 100% students enrolled in the course. The full time sessions comprised 61% students while the evening session comprised 39% students. The female students formed 57% of the population and the remaining 43% were males. Regarding the medium of instruction at the school level, 82.29% students came from Arabic medium schools, 14.58% were from English medium, and 3.13% from other media. A small percentage (8%) of them were international students coming from the expatriate community living in the Sultanate of Oman.

The age group of full-time students ranged between 20 to 25 years while the part-time students were older ranging between the age group of 20 to 48 years. Most of the participants from the latter group were employed and approximately 50% of them had finished their diplomas about a decade earlier.

Teacher participants included two faculty members handling two full-time (morning) sessions and the author who taught the part-time (evening) session.

4.3. Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data on student and faculty perceptions which included a student questionnaire, a student focus group, and faculty interviews.

4.3.1. Student questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to get student perspectives on the challenges faced by them in citing sources and the reasons behind the challenges. They were informed that their responses will remain confidential. The questionnaire carried a total of 10 questions with some of the questions having further sub-sections. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic details which are discussed in the student participant details given above. The next section carried closed ended multiple choice questions. The last two questions focused on the student perceptions on the steps taken to support their writing. The open-ended question at the end sought suggestions on the kind of support tutors can provide to overcome the challenge. The questionnaire was checked by two experts of the field and piloted on a small sample. It was then uploaded on Survey Monkey so that responses can be collected online. The entire sample population answered the questionnaire since the faculty members made students understand the importance of the study and the way it will benefit them in future.

4.3.2. Student focus groups

Two focus group discussions, one with full-time and one with part-time students, were conducted with students ranging from high to low level performers. Focus groups provided deeper insights into the issue since they allowed interaction between the moderator and participants as
well as among the participants themselves. A list of questions was prepared in line with the research questions which guided the study. Students voiced their concerns freely as they were assured that their anonymity will be strictly maintained. To maintain anonymity, pseudonyms are used in the findings section. Each group comprised 6 students. The discussions lasted for about 35 minutes for each group. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. Then the data were analyzed and categorized into emerging themes.

4.3.3. Faculty interviews
Two faculty members who taught the Communication Skills course were interviewed to gather their perspectives on the way students cite references, the challenges students face, reasons behind these challenges and support mechanisms they adopt. Both interviews lasted for about 20 minutes each and were recorded. The data were transcribed and emergent themes were categorized. Descriptive analysis of data collected from various sources is presented in the section to follow.

5. Discussion of Findings
Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data from the student questionnaire with a focus on percentages. Emergent themes from qualitative data collected through student focus group discussions and faculty interviews were categorized into main issues covered in the study. The findings from various sources are synthesized and presented in-line with the research questions posed above.

5.1. Student perception on importance of source integration

As shown in Figure 1, most of the students feel that it is very important (33.46%) or important (37.50%) to integrate academic articles in assignments. Focus group discussion revealed why the students do not take it seriously despite knowing the importance when a full-time (morning) session student, Mohammed said, “Of course it is important but we have reasons. All our major subjects are technical so we need language support. We cannot just read articles without language background”. He further justified on behalf of others detailing why other students do not take it seriously by adding, “We are Computing and Engineering students and we feel that we do
not need experience in this since it is not something technical. We need technical knowledge, not this. Two hours of lab are amazing for us”.

A mixed response regarding the student perceptions on importance of using academic articles was received from the part-time (evening) students. Most of the part-timers do not consider it important. Ahmed mentioned, “Miss I think no because we lose time and it is not helpful for us-it wastes out time”. Abdullah added to this saying, “I think we are hardware students and it will not help us”. However, a female student Uroosa agreed that it is important and stated, “It is important for me and in future it can help us”.

From this, it can be safely deduced that although students agree that it is important but do not find it useful at this stage as they believe that they should focus on the technical knowledge related to their majors.

5.2. Most challenging assignment in the Communication Skills course

As evident from the Figure 2, students found the research based report as the most challenging (46.39%) since it involved, reading, summarizing, paraphrasing and integrating academic articles. This was followed by research based poster (26.80%) and oral presentations (26.81).

The report on research based case study required students to analyze a case on communication barriers and provide logical and creative solutions. In addition, they were asked to support their arguments with existing literature and draft a report following proper academic writing conventions. Considering the issue at hand, the author finds it not surprising that the students found the requirements of the first assignment overwhelming.

Table 1 below is a justification to the fact that it is not just one step of source integration that students find challenging but right from searching the article to the integration of sources, each step is challenging for them. Ramez voiced the challenge involved, saying, “May be it is more
difficult to analyze the whole long article and then summarize. Sometimes how I will conclude and summarize what I read is a challenge. A lot of words I have to find and our English language is not that much like the article in front of me”.

It is important to note here that the students were taught the skills of searching articles, summarizing them, drafting annotated bibliography, and preparing a reference list during the prerequisite module (ESP) and that these skills were reinforced during the beginning Communication skills module. Despite this, the students found the task still challenging. This is concurrent with the findings of Hirvela and Du’s (2013) study, where Chinese undergraduate level students confirmed paraphrasing and source integration as the most challenging aspect of academic writing.

Table 1. Degree of challenge in various tasks related to source integration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Very challenging</th>
<th>Challenging</th>
<th>Not challenging</th>
<th>Easy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding suitable academic articles</td>
<td>22.68%</td>
<td>56.70%</td>
<td>18.56%</td>
<td>2.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding the main content of articles</td>
<td>18.56%</td>
<td>45.36%</td>
<td>32.99%</td>
<td>3.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarizing articles</td>
<td>21.05%</td>
<td>40.00%</td>
<td>32.63%</td>
<td>6.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrating sources in your writing</td>
<td>13.40%</td>
<td>35.05%</td>
<td>47.42%</td>
<td>4.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citing articles properly</td>
<td>8.42%</td>
<td>37.89%</td>
<td>44.21%</td>
<td>9.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing reference list</td>
<td>4.17%</td>
<td>26.04%</td>
<td>57.29%</td>
<td>12.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3. Reasons behind the challenges faced in source integration

5.3.1. Student perceptions

The question on the reasons behind the challenge carried a number of the possible causes to choose from. As shown in the Figure 3, the most common reason was the length of the research articles, followed by difficulty in understanding the articles; time management issues since it is a time-consuming task; technical jargon used in the articles; lack of appropriate academic writing skills; and students’ dislike towards reading research articles.
During the focus group, the same reasons were reiterated along with an addition of a few more. Searching for the right article is the first step and the struggle begins at this stage itself. Ahmed, a part-time (evening) student said, “Teachers ask us to go to Google Scholar but I don’t get simple information so I go to Google and then when I find a good article, it is usually paid”. Other students also raised this issue of payment. Many of them are still not well versed in using library portal where students are provided free access to a number of databases. This very much confirms the findings of Plakans and Gebril’s (2013) study which established that selection of appropriate sources plays an important role in source integration. High achievers were better at locating and integrating information as compared to low performers which was observed by the teacher participants of this study as well.

It is important to mention here that the researcher had assumed that the students would be proficient in searching articles since this is taught in ESP ignoring the fact that they are still undergraduate level students and there is a huge gap between ESP which offered in semester 1 and Communication skills which offered in semester 5. This echoes Lamptey and Atta Onbeng’s (2012) belief whereby faculty are often under the false impression that students are aware of the conventions involved in source integration.

Another important observation that was revealed during the focus group discussion, with the part-time (evening) cohort. Three out of six students mentioned that they did not study ESP since they were exempted from taking this course. The reason for exemption was that these students had already completed their diploma at other institutions where they had taken similar academic writing course/s and joined the present institution to pursue their bachelor degree. This urged the researcher to verify student demographics further. It was revealed that 15 students out of the total of 97 were exempted from taking ESP and that 11 out of the exempted students belonged to the part-time (evening) session. Hence 11 (34.37%) students out of a total of 32 students from this cohort had not studied ESP course. This revelation answered the researcher’s concern on why this section faced comparatively more problems in integrating sources since she was the one complaining the most regarding citation related issues among the three tutors who handled the three sessions of Communication Skills. The other two tutors were teaching the morning session where most of the students had studied ESP and were comparatively better at the task.

Another reason consists in the difficulty in grasping the content of the research articles because of the complexity of structures and the technical jargon. In the focus group, they expressed, “Wording is too difficult”, “Maybe we don’t read the articles really well.” and “May be these article are written by professors and we are students.” This confirms what Luzon (2015) diagnosed as lack of awareness of the nature of academic texts and low level of academic literacy which is often one of the reasons behind the challenge since reading is an important element of the process. Other students mentioned that they hate reading long articles. Abid voiced on behalf of all, “May be they look at the article and think it is very long and they cannot understand so there is no point in reading this”. They believe that just understanding the subject content for the core discipline should be their concern. Haleem, a part-time student said, “For me I prefer watching a two minute video and understand rather than read a long article”. They find academic writing
courses as an added burden. According to Mohammed, “This is an extra burden. When we have a language module we feel we have a lot of work and reading”.

Many students reported that they have issues with managing their time well. Ahmed said, “I think students just start one day before and they just find information on any website”. For the part-time students, completing tasks in the stipulated time frame becomes more challenging since they have full time jobs and most of them are married and have other responsibilities as well. One student mentioned in response to the open-ended question in the questionnaire, “The problem facing the students in part time- there are many assignment that should be finished in time and also too much hard working to finish all tasks in time”. Harris (2015) has also emphasized poor time management as a major hindrance in achieving the tasks especially the ones which are more time consuming since the students have a lot of assignments to complete in a limited time-frame.

Some students also conceded that their level of proficiency and lack of expertise regarding academic writing conventions adds to their worries. Some of them said that they manage to understand main points but struggle to write Mohammed stated, “It is easy to understand but difficult to write as we don’t know how to link between the subject and the paper”. These findings concur with what Currie (1998) arrived at while discussing the distress faced by English as a Second Language (ESL) students in integrating source texts as they are at the developmental phase of language proficiency and have other academic work to complete as well.

5.3.2. Faculty perceptions

The faculty members who taught Communication Skills shared their observations regarding the challenges of citations and the possible reasons causing them. They also revealed the strategies they use in their classes to support students.

Since both the faculty members interviewed were handling full-time sessions, where the issue was expectedly not as grave as the part-time session, they mentioned that around 50% students were able to somehow manage it although not to the expected level.

The main reasons behind the challenge of source integration quoted by the faculty members were similar to the ones cited by students except a few. However, the faculty considered lower level language proficiency and lack of desired academic writing skills as the major reasons. Mr. Majid, a faculty member mentioned that the research articles usually carry complex structures and difficult technical vocabulary which students find difficult to grasp. He further emphasized, “Low language proficiency was a major reason. Those who could somehow find articles, reading and summarizing was still a big challenge. So they just copied points from abstracts” (M. Suleiman, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018). These very observations have been highlighted by other researchers such as Luzon (2015) and Neville (2008).

According to Dr. Suzie, the faculty member, some students just copy pasted the idea and changed a few synonyms here and there (S. James, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018). The following concern from Mr. Majid echoes Lamptey and Atta-Obeng’s (2010) conclusion that some students just do it for the sake of scoring marks.
The students just took the points and put them in the introduction of the report and then later on they used their language talking about the cases but connecting the article to the case was difficult… Sometimes you do not find any connection. They are just putting that to convince that ok we have used the article because you have asked us to do this (M. Suleiman, personal communication, Feb 5, 2018)

The faculty members also mentioned that due to lack of the desired language skills, the students often indulge in plagiarism though it might not be done intentionally. They copy portions of text and change a few words here and there which is considered unacceptable according to academic writing conventions. This is similar to what to Hyland (2001) noted, 

After they mentally compare their texts with target ‘expert texts’, they may feel so overwhelmed by the distance between what they are expected to achieve and what they feel capable of doing, that plagiarism seems the most realistic strategy (p. 380).

Another concern raised by faculty members is the students’ problems in searching appropriate research articles though they were taught this during ESP course. Plakans and Gebril (2013) also found issues related to appropriate article search among the participants of their study. According to a faculty member, students go to Google instead of using the library database which provides them free access to a number of databases. In addition, they are usually not willing to read and often complain that the articles are very long. Students also repeatedly complained about the length of the research articles.

Last but not the least important reason quoted by the faculty members was procrastination. According to them, the students lack the required skills in the first place and then they keep delaying the work to the last date. Unfortunately they end up either copying parts of the text or indulge in plagiarism, an issue which is discussed in this context by a number of researchers (Shi, 2004; Cumming et al.2005; Plakans, 2008).

5.4. Suggested strategies to overcome the challenge

The faculty members mentioned a number of steps adopted by them to support students in overcoming the challenge in future. Mr. Majid believes that the first step in this direction should be raising awareness on importance of source integration since incorrect textual borrowing is categorized as plagiarism. “It is a legal issue-not only academic”, he added. Amsberry (2009) strongly suggests implementation of awareness raising campaigns “through orientations, instruction, reference service, and web-based guides and tutorials” (p.31).

Mr. Majid mentioned that they had collective intensive reading sessions where they read two research articles together in class and located main sections of the paper which was useful. Dr. Suzie adopted peer-tutoring by using high achievers to support the others. Benefits of peer tutoring have been reported by a number of researchers (Topping, 1996; Beasley, 1997).

Dr. Suzie also emphasized on writing annotated bibliography as a preliminary step where students write a short summary of the research article and the rationale behind choosing it. This supports students while integrating sources in their reports at a later stage. Annotated bibliography writing is also recommended by McCollum (2011) who believes that it works as “a diagnostic tool to help instructors determine whether students comprehend the source material (p.80)”. 

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A recapitulation on what was taught in the pre-requisite ESP module was also suggested. We as tutors assume that the students will remember all the steps by default, however, this does not seem to be true since, as mentioned earlier, there is a long gap between ESP and Communication Skills. Therefore, there can be shorter revision sessions on searching articles, summarizing, writing annotated bibliography and preparing reference list. In addition, conventions of academic writing should also be revised before engaging students in research based writing.Lastly, the faculty also suggested process based assignments where students submit parts of the assignment instead of the whole product at the end. This can be done by asking students to submit a brief proposal, an outline, summaries of articles read and drafts of their reports. These steps would most certainly relieve students’ stress and reduce academic integrity violation issues.

![Figure 4](image_url)

*Figure 4* Student perceptions on the support provided in class

During focus group discussions and in the last question (open-ended) of the questionnaire, students were asked about the kind of support they expect from the faculty, a number of useful suggestions were revealed. Most of them feel that they need more practice in searching articles and language skills. The following useful comments were received by students in response to the open-ended question:

“We need to make practice to do searching in article and how can analyses it”.

“We need more practice on writing skills.

“As we work in ICT, most of our time we work in hardware so we lose our skills of writing and reading. So we need more practice.”

“Provide us with useful links so that the search becomes easier.”

During focus group also they emphasized on language skills development and requested support in terms of article search. A useful suggestion which came from focus group participants is an example of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) approach. The approach is adopted by the Center for Academic Writing at the research site where the writing focused core modules are co-taught by language teachers and subject specialists. The students who brought about this had taken
such courses and wanted similar support in other courses as well. Ahmed, who requested for this, mentioned “When technical subject is merged with academic writing-the outcome is beautiful.” WAC has been established as a very useful approach to support writing requirements of students where language specialists and subject experts collaborate to strengthen students’ academic writing skills (Ambron, 2006; Ault & Joseph, 1994). Hence the author recommends strong collaboration between subject specialists and EFL tutors to achieve the desired outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to unveil and comprehend the challenges faced by undergraduate level Omani Arab EFL learners in source based writing and the reasons behind them so that appropriate preventive and supportive measures can be adopted to assist students in overcoming such challenges. Relevant literature was reviewed to find out the similar challenges faced by students in other contexts and the reasons leading to these challenges quoted by the teaching fraternity across the board. Most of the findings concur with the existing literature. The main reasons causing inappropriate textual borrowing revealed in the findings include, low level of English proficiency (Neville, 2008); unawareness of the academic discourse (Luzon, 2015); inability to search appropriate articles (Plakans & Gebril, 2013); lack of academic writing skills (Jomaa & Bidin, 2017) dislike towards reading research articles since they are long, contain complex structures and technical jargon; time management issues (Harris, 2015); and procrastination. The study confirms that inappropriate use of sources is not the result of students’ intention to cheat or plagiarize in the first place but their lack of mastery over academic reading and writing skills, a finding supported by Luzon, (2015). The paper ends with certain supportive strategies highlighted during the interviews which include, a session on searching appropriate articles; summarizing and annotated bibliography writing practice; locating important points of an article through collective intensive reading; introduce process oriented assignments with parts submission, for example, an outline, an article summary, an initial draft; and making use of peer tutoring. Moreover, the author recommends the incorporation of academic literacies in the mainstream courses and a strong collaboration between language instructors and core specialists.

7. Pedagogical Implications, Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This study adds to the current field of knowledge by examining Omani Arab EFL learners’ challenges. Though the findings cannot be generalized on all students, it can be safely assumed that the linguistic capabilities of learners in Arab and EFL contexts are considerably similar to the sample studied. Hence, the knowledge of challenges faced and their reasons provides insights into the issue to EFL teachers handling academic writing courses.

However, since this study was the first stage of a larger project where the challenges of integrating sources and their reasons were explored, it contained a number of limitations. Firstly, if the challenges and associated reasons are discovered at an earlier stage of the course, better planning can prevent the problem to a large extent. In addition, a closer investigation in the form of corpus analysis of student samples is required to provide necessary scaffolding to strengthen students’ source based writing. Finally, a larger student sample from different disciplines may undoubtedly enrich the findings and provide further insights into the challenges and reasons thereof.
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References


Learning English Language in Authentic Settings: A Case Study with Foundation Level Students in Oman

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Abstract
This study explores factors impacting learning English Language through the implementation of an authentic task-based method, dubbed English Souk (or Market English), currently employed at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Muscat, Oman. The present mixed-method study specifically aims to find answers to the following research questions: (a) How do General Foundation Programme (GFP) students assess the English Souk initiative? (b) What challenges, if any, do the English Souk participants face during the simulation of the activity? And (c) What impacts do they state the English Souk has on developing oral communicative skills in them? The results were obtained via questionnaires returned from 50 GFP English Souk participants as well as a focus group conducted with eight voluntary subjects which were mapped against the views of six GFP teachers. They revealed a high degree of common satisfaction amongst the student and faculty respondents with the aim and intended outcomes of the English Souk approach. They also uncovered how the innovative practice had a positive correlation with developing learners’ language skills, irrespective of the challenges they faced during the enactment of the activity. Implication of these and other issues for further investigation are discussed.

Key Words: authentic assessments, authentic task-based materials, English souk, General Foundation Programme, innovation, oral communicative skills

Introduction

With the passage of time, the provision of learning and the transmission of knowledge have been accompanied by major transformations necessary to keep up with the challenges of modernity. As opined by Ozverir & Herrington (2011), the approaches in teaching that may have been effective in the past may not now necessarily deliver the same outcome, as knowledge and the necessary skills needed to acquire them also undergo rapid change. The same is true with English language teaching. In fact, Oura (2007) mentions in his study in authentic task-based materials: bringing the real world into the classroom that the real challenge for English language teachers, especially those involved in ESL instruction, is how to capture the interest and to stimulate the imagination of their students so that they will be more motivated to learn. It is widely held by proponents of authentic based materials English as second language teaching like Nunan (2015), & Roessingh (2004) that this kind of learning process becomes relevant and more meaningful because the learner sees the activity as relevant to his or her learning needs reflecting real-world language. In this way, students are in a better vantage point to be more critical and appreciate better the usefulness of what they are actually learning.

At the core of this discussion is the aspect of creativity and resourcefulness of the teacher or mentor regarding the provision of learning using authentic materials or engaging language teaching in an authentic setting. It should be noted that by authentic here, this paper makes use of the definition provided by Nunan (2015) in which the author considers authentic materials as spoken or written language data that have been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching. In short, this departs from the typical text-book approach towards English Second Language (ESL) instruction. A closer look at this concept reveals that in this teaching, students are encouraged to bring into the classroom their own samples of authentic language data from ‘real-world’ contexts outside of the classroom. They can practice listening to and reading genuine language drawn from many different sources, including TV and radio broadcasts, taped conversations, meetings, talks, and announcements. In addition, it is also possible to read magazine stories, hotel brochures, airport notices, bank instructions, advertisements and a wide range of other written messages from the real world in situations as they occur which affect what is called learning beyond the four walls of the classroom (Nunan, 2015). As used by Lombardi (2008), authentic learning requires materials that have been produced to fulfill some social purpose in the language community.

It is imperative to understand the value of using authentic methods in ESL teaching. In the work of Bahrani & Sim (2013), the authors argue that ESL learning must not at all be based on a closed classroom setting. They opine that effective learning acquisition especially for non-native speakers of the language is important as it adds spontaneity as well as variety to learning. They even suggest that the choice of materials in an authentic setting is indeed very crucial. Yang (2010) hints that there are some researchers who point out that more authentic materials are needed in the classroom because of the wide disparity that is often found between materials developed specifically for English language teaching and authentic conversation. The author goes as far as discussing how the task-based approach can indeed be very useful in this regard. The author identifies what task based learning is, claiming that it is an overall approach to language learning that views the tasks that learner does as central to the learning process. The learning process is seen as a set of communicative tasks that are directly linked to curricular goals. There is an
emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language and enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning (Aksu Atac, 2012).

As mentioned, the critical aspect of authentic teaching of ESL lies in the creativity and resourcefulness of the activities to be done. In the Sultanate of Oman, post-secondary school students must be able to complete their Foundation education, which consists of three levels, prior to acceptance in Higher Education (HE). It is to be understood that English is not the primary language. As such, Omani students especially in the Level 1 General Foundation Programme (GFP) at a specific HEI in Muscat participate in an activity of authentic learning through the English Souk. The Souk is an open-air marketplace or commercial quarter in Middle Eastern and North African cities. The equivalent Persian term is "bazaar". In here, the students primarily engage themselves in selling activities in this marketplace provided that the language that they will use is English. Students in this level can sell anything they want but they need to use English as a medium of transaction. They also have to fully explain the products and services to the customers using the English language. The Souk is made for students to be confident in different language skills. In addition they design posters and brochures, they do some market research and other related tasks. There are also some prizes and recognition given to the best product and group. In effect, the goal of the English Souk is to make the students appreciate and utilize English in a real world setting. In this way, they may also come to fully realize the practical utility of the English language, which in itself is the global language used by a great majority worldwide (Muller, 2005).

This study shall primarily look into the effectiveness of the English Souk as an intervention and innovation in ESL language teaching at the selected HEI under study. The main thrust of the paper is anchored on how this authentic setting can be beneficial in providing ample learning avenues for students to develop their ESL skills.

Objectives of the Study
The main objective of the study is to explore how effective can the English Souk be as an authentic setting for ESL language instruction, through defining the concept behind its utilization in teaching ESL level 1 GFP students. The study also intends to measure the extent of the implementation of the Souk activity and how successful it has been to build language skills among the targeted students. Further in line, the study intends to underscore the challenges faced by students in such an authentic setting and attempts to propose solutions to the perceived issues with discussing defined recommendation for possible modifications and/or changes in order to ensure a more meaningful and progressive learning environment through the Souk as an authentic language learning avenue.

Research Questions
This study explores the following research questions:
1. What is the concept behind the English Souk as an authentic learning activity in teaching ESL to Level 1 General Foundation students?
2. To what extent has the English Souk activity been successful in building language skills among the students?
3. What are the issues and challenges confronting students engaged in English Souk as an authentic English language learning activity and how can these concerns be properly addressed?

4. What changes can be recommended or interventions activated to ensure a more progressive and meaningful implementation of the English Souk?

Significance of the Study
The study is considered significant for the following reasons; first and foremost, for the Level 1 General Foundation students, so that they can be able to learn not only the dynamics involved in organising the English Souk, but more importantly be able to learn the proper usage and application of the English language in the real world setting. This is important so that they can fully appreciate the over-all usefulness of the said language. It can also serve as an effective way for them to be able to gauge their English language proficiency. In this way, they will be provided with ample grounds to appraise and check their strong points as well as their weak areas so that proper adjustments can be effectively carried out.

The study is also deemed significant for teachers/ mentors and faculty members handling ESL courses as this innovation may provide them with an additional learning avenue to teach and gauge at the same time the learning of the students. For the academic institutions, they can continue to strive to better this learning programme and for those who are not yet adopting such practice to include it in their respective curriculum, there should be a curriculum development that must integrate innovative techniques such as the English Souk. Lastly, this paper can be of great value for other researchers, students and academicians, who wish to embark on a related study.

Research Design
Data were obtained from the quantitative design that was carried out, which in the case of this investigation was through a survey. In addition, a Key Resource Interview (KRI) was also conducted with some student participants and faculty members facilitating English Souk classes in order to corroborate or negate the findings in the survey conducted. Through these methods, effective triangulation is achieved with the survey, the KRI and the Literature review utilized for a more comprehensive analysis. A total of fifty respondents from Level 1 ESL Foundation class were purposively chosen for the survey. The survey was mainly done in order to understand the perception of the students regarding the English Souk as well as to underscore any modifications that need to be done to make it more reflective of student’s aptitude and responsive to the changing needs of ESL learning especially for Level 1 Foundation students in Oman.

1.1 Research Locale
The study is located in one of the leading higher education institutions in the Sultanate of Oman and is affiliated to several universities in the UK and the Netherlands. It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in different areas of Engineering, Computing, Business Management, and Archival Studies.

Prior to admission to any undergraduate programmes, some students need to undergo the General Foundation Programme (GFP) in compliance with the Ministry of Higher Education. On successful completion of the GFP, students acquire the required degree of proficiency in four learning areas: English language, General Study Skills, Computing and Mathematics.
The English Souk is an activity for GFP English level 1 students where they can showcase the culture and cuisine and sell products of different nations. This is usually held during the first three weeks of the semester as an avenue for students to be acquainted with each other and help them adjust to college life. Students are divided into groups for the creation of their booths. Some group members will be responsible for advertising and issuing invitations; another team will display and sell the products and the last team will be presenting the nation’s rich culture and heritage to the audience through video presentation and games. The best groups are judged by an inter-departmental panel of faculty and are awarded with prizes.

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The paper’s thrust is mainly anchored on the analysis of the English Souk as an authentic setting for ESL instruction among selected Level 1 foundation students in Oman. The following data sought to see whether it has a significant correlation with ESL aptitude and learning of the students.

**Descriptive results:**

Table 1 *Respondents’ feedback on the efficiency of the English Souk as an Authentic ESL tool (%).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ON THE EFFICIENCY OF SOUK AS AN ESL TOOL I have:</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>To some extent</th>
<th>I don’t know</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. an awareness regarding what English Souk is, its purpose and intent.</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. an understanding of how English Souk is effectively carried out.</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. a firm belief in the goals of English Souk as it fosters a collaborative environment for the improvement of the ESL instruction in Oman.</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. seen improvement in my English communication skills and those of my peers through the English Souk.</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. gained confidence speaking in English</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. an ample perception that the English Souk activity is beneficial and realistic in developing my speaking.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. some reservations regarding the materials that are used like the posters, there must be more use of multimedia.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. some observations regarding teacher training and guidance for English Souk activity as well as proper evaluation of student performance.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. some observations regarding carefully prepared guidelines on the conduct of Souk activity especially with how students are gauged</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It can be argued that based on the responses, there exists a positive correlation between the levels of competency of students under Level 1 ESL when subjected under the English Souk. This means that the English Souk is perceived to be an effective tool that corresponds to an increase in student ESL aptitude and practical use. This is also the same line of reasoning presented by the teachers who were interviewed as they opined that students who undergo the English Souk are more “confident and expressive” They are also held to be more decisive and bold in their undertakings. Figure 1 shows clearly that majority of the students have a firm belief in the goals of English Souk as it fosters their collaborative environment for the improvement of the ESL instruction in Oman. This is indicative of the high level of trust that students have regarding the English Souk. These findings correlate well with Brown (2007) who asserts that with the help of both the surroundings and the teacher, students can become more confident in using the English as the target language. As the students gain confidence using the target language, they can then be transferred outside of the classroom. This real-world context outside the classroom can be a place where students look for opportunities to initiate conversation in the target language, thus enhancing their communication skills. This also goes in line with Francom (2010) who reveals that authentic tasks promote more confidence and foster creativity.

Figure 1 The English Souk has fostered a collaborative environment to improve the ESL instruction in Oman

This is also reflected in Figure 2, which is mainly about the students’ perception of the improvement in their communication skills as well as those of their peers as it registered a percentage of 70. This can be correlated with the findings of Aladjem, & Jou, (2016) who opine that when students are offered the chance to engage in a professional relationship with real clients, they are learning useful real-world skills.
The two figures 3 and 4 indicate that there are some reservations and related observations regarding how the English Souk is being conducted. In effect, the student respondents believe that there must be some improvements that need to be carried out. This can be seen in Figure 3 which registers a total percentage of 33% (15% said yes and 18% said to some extent) as well as in figure 4 with a total rate of 32% (12% and 20%). This means that the students believe that while the authentic activity is good and beneficial, there exists a great need to develop its facilitation. This is congruent with the perception that students are not properly gauged in the English Souk activities, which can be done through effective teacher training and upgrading of competencies as well as the use of other instructional materials that could better equip students who undergo the English Souk practice. This is emphasized by Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves (2003) on the role of the teachers in authentic learning i.e. to coach, facilitate and support students as they fulfill authentic tasks.

This is the same sentiment as expressed by the ESL teachers handling the English Souk as they have lamented the need for greater administrative support with regards to the necessity of increasing their competencies through exposure, workshop/seminars and training. They have also pointed out the need for greater collaboration between the schools and government agencies handling the education sector in Oman.
Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the English Souk is an effective authentic ESL tool that positively affected the students’ aptitude, skills and practical use of English as a second language in Oman. This is observed based on the perception of the students regarding the impact of the English Souk upon them as well as on their peers. The teachers who opined that the English Souk has been an integral factor in providing confidence among the students also seconded this. Thus, it is apparent that the success of the purposeful real-life souk activity has boosted the EFL learners’ confidence, motivation and reflected positive attitude towards learning (Aladjem & Jou, 2016).
The learners did not merely display knowledge or drilled practiced communicative skills but also exercised the process of thinking and doing to produce the result of buying or selling, that can also be known as, the production of the frame work of knowledge and skills (Roessingh, 2004). This, all in all, fosters language learning in a cyclical, ongoing manner (Pollari, 2015) where it allows the EFL learners to understand, perform, and reflect on the English Souk task, which can be produced with a wealth of real use target language (English).

Moreover, the English Souk activity supported the GFP level 1 learners to move into challenging cognitive domains through the utilization of dialogues or conversations that were going on during the period of selling and buying. By this, learners managed not only to develop their communicative skills, but also to develop their critical, independent thinking to share viewpoints and ideas. As such, the English Souk task can evidently be considered to be a productive genuine task and conductive enough to gain communicative goal, where the speaker and the listener exchange information in a flexible, relaxed atmosphere; a necessary environment for effective learning to take place.

Nevertheless, it can also be concluded that there are some issues and concerns regarding the English Souk, one of these is the fact that students believe they are not properly gauged with the English Souk. Another is the observation of the teachers that there must be more adequate support coming from the college’s administration. It can also be concluded, as per the outcomes of the study and the collective response both from the students and the teacher interviewees, that proper upgrading of competencies through training is indeed necessary. This leads to proposals for viable recommendations to enhance future practices of the authentic task based learning.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions presented, the following recommendations are given.

1. There should be a module that should be developed to have appropriate parameters and rubrics that can be used as a basis of assessment specifically for student progress and aptitude development in the field of ESL learning.

2. Additional funding from the government education sector in Oman should be promoted and exercised. The additional funding should be funneled directly to initiatives aimed at further improving the facilitation of authentic language teaching in the country.

3. There should also be added administrative support from the academic institutions that use authentic language teaching in order to provide skills upgrade for teachers through seminars, lectures and additional training; as well as, facilities for improvement and logistics support for the students and teachers.

4. Lastly, further studies and research can be conducted, along the line of the investigation pursued in this paper to have a more in depth analysis of Souk as an authentic ESL avenue.
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References


Who is at Edge – Tutors or Tutees? Academic, Social and Emotional elevation through Peer Tutoring

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Abstract:  
Peer tutoring or peer assisted learning is an effective instructional strategy that involves active and interactive participative learning process resulting in a deeper understanding of concepts for both ‘Tutors’ and ‘Tutees’. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of peer tutoring on Academic achievements of the students in the General Foundation and Undergraduate Programmes at a private college in Oman. It will further explore other advantages, especially social and emotional benefits, the tutors and tutees may gain by taking part in peer tutoring programme held at Middle East College, Oman. The study was conducted through an online survey, personal interviews and judging the in-class performances of these students. The results revealed some interesting benefits for both the ‘Tutors’ and the ‘Tutees’. For the ‘Tutors’ it was a bolstering experience as it led to increased knowledge and skills; self-confidence; and a sense of responsibility. The ‘Tutees’ on the other hand developed – (i) a better liking for the subject concerned; (ii) better cooperation skills among their peers; (iii) increased motivation to study a particular subject; (iv) better communication Skills; (v) better stress management; and (vi) confidence. Peer tutoring is seen as a great advantage to gain learner autonomy to reap the full benefits of academic life by nurturing innate talent and abilities. The shift from teacher-led to student-centered classes has been hailed as a milestone in order to foster learner autonomy and productive learning.  
Keywords: academic support, at-risk, feedback, flexible environment, learner autonomy, peer assisted learning.

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1. Introduction

Peer tutoring comprises of students serving as academic tutors and tutees in a flexible environment where high performing student is paired with a lower performer to review critical academic or behavioral concepts (Hott & Walker, 2012). “Peer tutoring is an approach in which one child instructs another child in material on which the first is an expert and the second is a novice” (as cited in Kalkowski, 2007). It is not a new concept, its genesis can be found in the use of archons by Aristotle but it was theorized by a Scotsman, Andrew Bell in 1795 after observing Indian orphans teaching alphabets to each other by writing on sand. It was only in the 19th century that it was implemented in English and French schools (Briggs 2013). In the present system of education, the main aim is to instill a belief in the learners that “Their putative failures or shortcomings can be ascribed to a lack of effective strategies rather than to a lack of potential (Thanasoulas 2000). As Vygotsky (1978) says “Learning is an internalised form of a formerly social activity, and a learner can realize [his] potential interactively - through the guidance of supportive persons such as parents, teachers, and peers” (as cited in Wenden, 1998: p.107). Every educational institution has students of different academic abilities and thus lies the necessity of academic support in the form of peer tutoring especially for the at-risk and high-risk students to help them pass their courses. This study investigates the effects of Peer Tutoring on the final grades of ‘Tutees’ and their ‘Tutors’ in the General Foundation and Undergraduate Programmes in Middle East College in Oman. It studies the differences between the final grades of at-risk and high-risk students before and after Peer tutoring. The results of this study were analysed after conducting interviews with both ‘Tutees’ and ‘Tutors’ and also getting them to fill up a detailed questionnaire on Peer Tutoring.

2. Literature Review

Raheem, Yusuf, & Odutayo (2017) conducted a study examining the effect of peer tutoring on the academic performance of economics students in Ilorin-South Local Government of Kwara State, Nigeria and its gender wise bearing. The experiment was conducted on two classes in two different secondary schools to determine the difference in performance between students taught with peer tutoring and conventional instructional strategy in economics. The experimental (peer tutoring) group had a population of 40 students while the control (conventional instruction) group had a population of 38 students. A 50-item multiple-choice objective test titled Economics Performance Test (EPT) was used to measure academic performance. The research questions were: (i) What is the effect of peer tutoring and conventional instructional strategies on students’ performance in economics? (ii) Will the performance of students taught using peer tutoring instructional strategy vary on the basis of gender?

The results of the test showed that the students taught with the peer tutoring method had a greater mean score ($M = 14.94$) than those taught with the conventional instruction method ($M = 10.07$), thereby proving that peer tutoring instructional strategy has a significant effect on students’ academic performance. Peer tutoring depends on the process of mutual help between classmates that allows the transfer of control to the students in the classroom. The teachers get involved when the tutors have difficulty explaining a particular concept or have issues understanding the language used by the tutees. Another reason for its success is that knowledge is approached from multiple and missing perspectives, which allows students to learn from one another. It was also found that, gender had no role to play in the performance of students taught...
with peer tutoring strategy. Improved academic performance in economics had no gender bias, i.e. it did not favour male over female students or vice-versa. Both male and female students showed improvement in their performance when exposed to peer tutoring.

Thus it was observed that peer tutoring not only helps in academic improvement of students but also increases the quality of interaction with their peers. Although not everyone may gain equally from participation, peer tutoring offered the opportunity for each participant to become aware of his / her weaknesses. It was also suggested that teachers can help by exposing students to peer tutoring instructional strategy while passing out instructions in the classroom to create awareness among the students.

3. Methods

A study was conducted at Middle East College, Muscat, a private college in Oman, to investigate the effectiveness of peer tutoring on academic achievements of the students in the General Foundation (GFP) and Undergraduate (UG) programmes. The list of the ‘Tutors’ and the ‘Tutees’ was procured from the peer tutoring coordinators in different departments of the college. Both the ‘Tutors’ and ‘Tutees’ were asked to fill out a detailed online questionnaire about their reflections and perceptions of the peer tutoring programme they were engaged in. Interviews of some of the ‘Tutors’ and ‘Tutees’ were also conducted, the respondents were from both GFP and UG programmes. The sampling size was: 18 tutors, 30 tutees from GFP and 30 tutors, 50 tutees from the UG programmes.

4. Results of the survey – Reflections on Peer Tutoring

Following are the results based on the responses to some of the questions of the online survey:

![Figure 1. Peer tutoring is rewarding](image)

Figure 1 shows that nearly 95% of the tutees and tutors agreed that peer tutoring had been rewarding for them. This is a very encouraging response for the continuity of this endeavor as undertaken by the college.
There was an overwhelming response to this question (Figure 2). All tutors agreed that their knowledge had increased whereas only 10% tutees were unsure about it. This might have been because the improvement in their results were marginal. But it was certain that there was an enhancement of the knowledge of the students in general.

Figure 2. Increase of knowledge

I feel more confident about my ability to succeed as a result of my experience.

Figure 3. Increase in confidence
All the tutors felt that their confidence level in that particular subject had increased (Figure 3). 10% of the tutees were uncertain about it but the rest 90% were happy that they were more confident after they went through the peer tutoring programme.

Figure 4. Greater Sense of Responsibility

Figure 4 shows that 70% of the tutees felt that they experienced a greater sense of responsibility for their success and 95% of the tutors opined that peer tutoring has given rise to a sense of greater responsibility. This proves that peer tutoring helps both the tutees and the tutors in developing their overall personalities.

Figure 5. Future perspective on peer tutoring (peer tutors’ point of view)
Figure 6. Future perspective on peer tutoring (tutees’ point of view)

In figures 5 & 6, both the tutors and the tutees were asked to give their opinions about the future of peer tutoring in the college. The responses show that they were satisfied with this programme and would very much like to continue with it. The fact that many tutees wanted to be tutors in future indicates that they would like to step into the shoes of the tutors. All these data prove the success of peer tutoring programme at MEC.

From the results mentioned above it can be inferred that peer tutoring transforms the classroom from a place where not only does the dispersal of knowledge take place but also with a multiple approach and perspective. It, thereby allows students to learn from one another. Invariably, peer tutoring depends on the process of mutual help between classmates, allowing the transfer of control to the students in the classroom. Peer tutoring allows the teachers to accommodate a classroom of diverse students, including slow learners, at-risk and high-risk students (AbdulRaheem, Yusuf, Odutayo, 2017).

5. Benefits of Peer Tutoring

There are some general benefits of Peer Assisted Learning for all associated with it. For Tutees, they (peers) usually find their own ways of communicating with each other and many times they present a concept in a better way than the teacher. They use fresh ideas from their own personal experiences and use communicating symbols that make learning easier. This results in making lessons more interesting; easier to follow and more enjoyable and learners also seem to learn more. For Tutors, they gain a feeling of doing something useful with what they have already learnt and reinforcing their knowledge of the subject: they spend time in revising the subject matter they are going to teach to their peers which results in making their knowledge deeper and clearer. It is said that we learn 95% of what we teach. The peer tutors develop their ability and skill to teach and guide other students and also get an insight into how others feel about a particular subject. The self-esteem of the tutors rises and they feel that have done something useful when they see their tutees succeed. They also enjoy respect from tutees. Structured peer tutoring
improves communication and cooperation among students, enhances the team spirit and helps socialization, and they get to know about people from different social backgrounds. For Teachers, Peer tutoring helps them by making lessons easier to handle and makes teaching more enjoyable and the pupils also seem to learn more. Teachers can devote more time to preparing their lessons (Goodlad, 1998).

Thus peer tutors should be trained by: defining and developing procedures for social skills they may need throughout peer tutoring like sharing, taking turns, using respectful language, and accepting criticism or feedback; defining and developing procedures for moving into peer tutoring groups quickly and quietly; explaining and allowing students to practice prior to the first peer tutoring session (using a prepared script for practicing interactions. Fulk & King, 2001); training them in providing feedback for correct and incorrect peer responses, including praise; teaching them how to carefully monitor their own and their partner’s progress; for at-risk students providing academic intervention in the form of tutoring is necessary like self-determined tutoring, academic advisor scheduled tutoring, group tutoring, one-to-one tutoring, peer tutoring, and professional tutoring (Hott & Walker, 2012).

6. Importance of Peer Tutoring

Peer Tutoring / Peer Mentoring / Peer Assisted Learning is a two way reciprocal learning activity also defined as “the acquisition of knowledge and skill through active helping and supporting among status equals or matched companions” (Topping & Ehly 1998, p.1). “Peer tutoring is a form of cooperative learning that teaches students to work together in a positive manner and to coach one another as they develop specific skills” (Sanders, 2001). It is a cost-effective means of providing academic support to students using a valuable teaching and learning resource, namely other students (Beasley 1997). Peers are students who are generally of the same age having similar abilities which makes them approachable as they have a better understanding of the problems faced by their fellow learners. High achievers / successful students are trained to assist the low achievers / slow learners in a collaborative environment which richly benefits both the parties (Beasley 1997). Peer tutoring is beneficial to both the ‘Tutees’ and ‘Tutors’ as it improves: their understanding of the subject concerned; their confidence level and performance; and mutual trust and friendship by sharing of knowledge, ideas and experience. It can be described as a way of moving beyond independent to interdependent or mutual learning (Boud, 1988). The ‘Tutors’ not only provide guidance in teaching they also act as mentors and counsel their ‘Tutees’. The ‘Tutors’ develop skills in organizing and planning learning activities, working collaboratively with others, giving and receiving feedback and evaluating their own learning. Peer learning is becoming an increasingly important part of many courses, and it is being used in a variety of contexts and disciplines in many countries (Boud 1988). The ‘Tutors’ often want to continue their mentoring as they realize that that the best way to really develop one's understanding of an area is to teach it to some-one else.

Academicians and researchers like Egger and Sadovi (2008), claim that peer-tutoring helps the tutors to enhance their knowledge about the subject as they are thoroughly looking for the right material and sources to offer a well-grounded support to the tutees. Also in order for tutors to be capable of teaching, they need to study the materials, they are supposed to teach, carefully, which requires them to spend more time reviewing and preparing (Sadovi, 2008). Tutors
are more likely to go back and check some reference books and sources to achieve their tutoring task professionally. Since Peer tutoring is “building a student support network” (Korinek et al., 1999) exchanging teaching tips with the other peer tutors and teachers helps improve the whole process of learning. Therefore, students' academic performance is likely to be affected positively by being peer tutors (Eggers, 1995). It is a proven fact that our concept and understanding of a topic becomes more solid and comprehensive when we teach that topic, especially, when a course is well-structured and implemented with explicit objectives (Sadov, 2008).

7. **Types of Peer Tutoring**

   Academic peer tutoring at various colleges or universities maybe of different types, namely: (i) **Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS):** PALS, involves a teacher pairing students who need additional instruction or help with a peer who can assist (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Burish, 2000). There is flexibility in forming groups and they often change often according to the subject or skills. All students get an opportunity to function as a tutor or tutee at different times. Students are typically paired with other students who are at the same level, and having similar abilities. (ii) **Class-wide Peer Tutoring (CWPT):** also known as cooperative learning divides classmates into small groups, with each person in the group responsible for teaching others, and each contributing a unique piece to the group performance on a task. Typically, CWPT involves highly structured procedures, direct rehearsal, competitive teams, and posting of scores (Maheady, Harper, & Mallette, 2001). The entire class participates in structured peer tutoring activities two or more times per week for approximately 30 minutes (Harper & Maheady, 2007). The class is divided into groups of two to five students and they act as both ‘tutors’ and ‘tutees’. The members of the groups keep changing. (iii) **Cross-age Peer Tutoring:** also known as Surrogate teaching, common at larger universities, involves giving older students, often graduates or advanced undergraduates, some or all of the teaching responsibility for undergraduate courses. Here he positions of tutors and tutees do not change. The older student serves as the tutor and the younger student as the tutee. Tutors ask questions, encourage better study habits and serve as a model of appropriate behavior. (iv) **Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT):** A more specific version of cooperative learning, divides classmates into pairs to tutor each other (Goodlad & Hurst, 1989 and Topping, 1998). Two or more students alternate between acting as the tutor and tutee during each session, with equitable time in each role. The ‘tutors’ are encouraged to prepare teaching material, monitor answers, and evaluate and encourage peers. Higher performing students are paired with lower performing students. (v) **Same-age Peer Tutoring:** Peers who are almost of the same age are paired to review key concepts. Students with similar ability levels or a more advanced student can be paired with a less advanced student. When pairing students with differing levels, the roles of tutor and tutee are alternated, allowing the lower performing students to quiz the higher performing students. Same-age peer tutoring, like Class wide peer tutoring, can be completed within the students’ classroom or tutoring can be completed across differing classes. Procedures are more flexible than traditional class-wide peer tutoring configurations.

8. **Peer tutoring support provided at Middle East College (MEC)**

   MEC provides different types of peer tutoring support to the students at both General Foundation Programme (GFP) and Undergraduate levels, which are as follows: (i) **Instructional Peer Tutoring:** here older, brighter students coach the juniors either on a one-to-one basis or by one-to-a group basis. There is a mutual agreement on how the assistance will be provided. This is
practiced when there is a big difference between tutors and tutees. (ii) *Monitorial Tutoring*: here the class is divided into groups of 4 or 5 members with a monitor assigned to lead each group. The teacher has more time to attend to the rest of the class while tutors monitor and help their tutees. (iii) *Pair tutoring*: here students of the same age, one better skilled than the other interact and help one another to pursue the learning activity, by reading and discussing together. (iv) *Structural Peer Tutoring*: It is applied in specific cases and for particular subjects, and follows a well-structured plan prepared by the teacher. It is generally spontaneous, well planned by experienced teachers who combine tutors and tutees appropriately in order to have good results. Assistance of trained tutors is required in following instructions or definite procedures that are provided in the coursework.

8.1. Roles and Responsibilities of Peer Advisors at MEC

*Peer Advising* is a part of a strategic plan to widen communication channels with the student population. A few well trained peers can disseminate information more effectively and serve as role models to the rest of the student community. On the basis of their academic and attitude profiles, a few students have been selected as Peer Advisors. Those selected will attend training sessions conducted by the Registration Department and the Academic Advising Committee designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to guide other students. The duties and responsibilities of Peer Advisors are: (i) To guide students who are unfamiliar with the online registration process; (ii) To try to get students to understand the role of an advisor; (iii) To encourage online student feedback; (iv) To explain the process of module selection and other programme regulations if students are unsure. (Peer advisors are not authorized to select modules for students but only to clarify to students the process of module selection); (v) To guide students to the student counselor if approached with attitudinal and other behavioral problems; (vi) To inform students of their advisor if students are unaware; (vii) To inform the members of the Academic Advising Committee any concerns or problems regarding Academic Advising brought to their notice; (viii) Student advisors will be expected to fulfill their responsibilities only during the registration period and Add/Drop period.

8.2. Procedures for conducting peer tutoring at Middle East College (MEC)

The Student Success Centre (SSC) at MEC is responsible for the overall coordination and smooth conduct of the peer tutoring programme across various academic departments. Peer-tutoring coordinators in each academic department is responsible for arranging and supervising peer-tutoring for modules (especially with high failure rate) offered by the departments. The peer-tutors are responsible for conducting peer-tutoring sessions and the tutees are responsible for registering for sessions via the peer-tutor coordinator in the respective academic departments.

The peer-tutoring programme coordinator at SSC informs Heads of the different Departments to appoint peer-tutoring coordinators for their own departments. He/she conducts a meeting in week 1 of every semester with the peer-tutoring coordinators and updates them on the handbook on peer-tutoring and important procedures that need to be followed. A list of prospective peer-tutors (students fulfilling the academic eligibility criteria as mentioned in peer-tutoring handbook) is provided to the peer-tutoring coordinators who may further filter the list according to their requirements. Peer-tutoring coordinators in various departments arrange and supervise peer-tutoring for the modules offered by the department, based on the student/faculty requests and
availability of peer-tutors. Workshops are conducted by the peer-tutoring programme coordinator at SSC to familiarize faculty (especially new joining) with different forms of peer-tutoring and peer-tutoring programme. At the end of Fall and Spring semesters (every year) a feedback is taken from the tutees, tutors and faculty. A ceremony is also organized (annually) to felicitate the peer-tutors where they receive mementos and certificates of appreciation.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>No. of Tutors</th>
<th>No. of Tutees</th>
<th>Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Foundation (GFP)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60% in Writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40% in Listening, Speaking and Reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70% in mathematics and Engineering modules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30% in computing and other modules</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the involvement of students in peer tutoring for the academic year 2017-2018 at MEC. 128 students were involved either as tutors or tutees across all the programmes including Engineering, Mathematics, Computing and English. English was encouraged as the language of communication although when concepts were difficult, Arabic was also used. At UG Levels, though peer tutoring support was available for all the subjects, majority of the tutees, (between 50% -70 %) sought help for mathematics and engineering modules. On the other hand, only 30% asked for help in computing and management modules. For GFP, most of the students, about 60%, showed interest in taking help from their peers in writing skills, whereas 40 % opted for other skills like listening, speaking and reading.

9. Limitations

Despite its popularity and success, peer tutoring has come under considerable scrutiny in recent years. Teachers might share the teaching tips and guidelines but students cannot be expected to become expert educators. There are chances that the tutor might not be able to support the tutees properly because of their inexperienc. Sometimes pairing of students can backfire because of their hesitancy or there might rise a feeling of inferiority when the tutees are taught by their own classmate or someone of the same level. Tutees might not put in required effort because of lack of keenness. This might create tensions between the ‘tutors’ and the ‘tutees’. Generally the students are aware of the identity of the ‘tutor’ and the ‘tutee’ which creates an opinion about a low achiever and a high achiever. Too much of transparency might lead to segregation among the students in a particular class (Guido, 2017). At times the tutees tend to depend too much on their peers to guide them, even for the easiest of the topics they look for support. This attitude might create a negative situation and can sometimes defeat the main purpose of peer tutoring and lead to ‘over tutoring’ and in the end the tutees do not learn anything. Unclear roles can also lead to questions on the credibility of tutors – in the absence of proper orientation some tutors might fail to live up to the expectations of the tutees and thus the credibility of the tutors comes under scanner. There should be certain laid down criteria for choosing peer tutors so that the teachers do not fall prey to
The main objective of peer tutoring will not be achieved if favoritism is used in the choice of tutors and they are incapable of imparting knowledge to their peers.

10. How to make peer tutoring a success

To make peer tutoring a success teachers should expose students to peer tutoring instructional strategy in passing out instruction in the classroom to aid the development of students’ generic skills. The things that need to be considered are (Briggs 2013): (i) Providing adequate tutor training – the students who are to become peer tutors should maintain a minimum GPA and obtain approval from their teachers before being paired with struggling students. Tutors should receive quality training in effective ways to work with their tutees. They should also be trained how to give positive verbal feedback, how much of it should be given and when it should be given without being very critical. Students can be prompted to come up with a list of standard statements which they feel may be positively reinforcing. (ii) Using a reward system – promise of a reward for students serves as a great encouragement in the participation in peer tutoring and improvement of grades. (iii) Emphasizing on confidentiality, positive reinforcement, and adequate response time – The tutors should design activities for extra practice, watch out for and correct mistakes, and provide positive feedback and encouragement. Opportunities should be presented for the students to formulate their own questions, discuss issues, explain their viewpoints, and engage in cooperative learning by working in teams on problems and projects. (iv) Choosing appropriate learning exercise to engage students in peer learning like role playing and modeling and reap the benefits of peer teaching. (v) Tutees must practice using a new task on their own. Tutors must provide instructional scaffolding, and gradually reduce their influence on a tutee’s comprehension. A tutor who engages in directive tutoring becomes a surrogate teacher, taking the role of an authority and imparting knowledge. The tutor who takes the non-directive approach is more of a facilitator, helping the student draw out the knowledge he already possesses. Under the directive approach, the tutor imparts knowledge on the tutee and explains or tells the tutee what he should think about a given topic. Under the non-directive approach, the tutor draws knowledge out of the tutee, asking open-ended questions to help the student come to his own conclusions about the topic. Both of these are valid methods, but different levels of each should be used with different students and in different scenarios.

To facilitate successful peer learning, teachers may also choose from an array of group strategies like Buzz Groups: A large group of students is subdivided into smaller groups of 4–5 students to consider the issues surrounding a problem. After about 20 minutes of discussion, one member of each sub-group presents the findings of the sub-group to the whole group. Affinity Groups: Groups of 4–5 students are each assigned particular tasks to work on outside of formal contact time. At the next formal meeting with the teacher, the sub-group, or a group representative, presents the sub-group’s findings to the whole tutorial group. Solution and Critic Groups: One sub-group is assigned a discussion topic for a tutorial and the other groups constitute “critics” who observe, offer comments and evaluate the sub-group’s presentation. Teach-Write-Discuss: At the end of a unit of instruction, students have to answer short questions and justify their answers. After working on the questions individually, students compare their answers with each other’s. A whole-class discussion subsequently examines the array of answers that still seem justifiable and the reasons for their validity.
11. Conclusion

Research has proven that peer tutoring is a useful strategy for all levels of students, working together, whether they have similar or different academic capabilities. The students who are average or below average are the ones who benefit the most. Peer tutoring as we have found out reinforces tutor’s own knowledge and skills, builds self-confidence and self-esteem, and a sense of responsibility. Observations made during this study show that students’ exposure to peer tutoring improves their interaction with their peers significantly both socially and academically. Although not everyone may gain equally from participation, it offered an opportunity for each participant to become aware of his weaknesses. Based on their test scores and student observations, it was concluded that peer tutoring can help to achieve the objectives of the modules. There have been two satisfying findings of this study: empowered and happy students and satisfied teachers. This study demonstrates that there was a great impact on the learners both at General Foundation Level and at Undergraduate level. What happened in these special sessions is a positive reinforcement for the use of peer tutoring. The results indicate positive impact of peer tutoring on students’ academic achievements. Students thus also demonstrated improved cooperation skills with peers and an increased motivation to engage in writing and oral reading. It is thus recommended that classroom teachers should implement peer tutoring into their daily classroom instruction as much as possible (Horvath 2011). According to Topping (1998), both tutees and tutors can yield significant academic gains through peer tutoring as it is a bolstering experience for tutors and increased motivation for tutees to study a particular subject and improved attitudes towards academics. It should be noted that the majority of peer-tutoring programs for students are intended to complement, not substitute for, regular classroom instruction. Tutoring should never be a substitute for professional teaching. An ideal learning atmosphere is a rich blend of peer and adult instructional strategies.

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Introducing ePortfolios to Prevent Plagiarism

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Abstract
There are many effective tools available to make learning interesting in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. One such tool is the use of an electronic portfolio, also known as a digital portfolio or an ePortfolio. This paper demonstrates how ePortfolios support formative assessment in a language classroom. An electronic portfolio could serve as a pedagogical tool to prevent plagiarism, as it is one of the authentic ways to assess the students’ performance during the course. Introducing ePortfolios at tertiary level can bring about the much-needed change in teaching, learning and assessment methods contributing to students’ academic success. The aim of the study was to enhance student learning by introducing ePortfolios to English for Special Purposes (ESP) learners at undergraduate level. The study explores the piloting of ePortfolio in ESP module for undergraduate students at a private college in Oman as part of the formative assessment in an attempt to prevent plagiarism and also to motivate the learners to showcase their coursework in a digital format. A qualitative and quantitative survey was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the practice and the results of the study indicate that the learners seem to have recognized the learning potential of ePortfolios, as their response to the above mentioned assessment method was quite positive. The findings of this study serve as a determining factor in deciding whether ePortfolios could effectively be used as a formative assessment tool for academic courses in the specific learning environment.

Keywords: academic ePortfolios, English for special purposes, ePortfolios, formative assessment, higher education, plagiarism

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1. Introduction

An academic e-portfolio is a digital collection of texts, multimedia tools such as video and audio files, class assignments, reference materials, and lecture notes (Abrami & Barrett, 2005). It could effectively be used to monitor as well as document students’ learning. It is a record that shows evidence of the students’ learning and as a developmental portfolio, it forms an integral part of formative assessment, as students can share their assignments electronically with their tutor for evaluation and receive feedback on their progress. It should be noted that such a close monitoring of the learners’ coursework aids in preventing plagiarism. There are two ways in which plagiarism could be prevented through the design of the programme or module, assessment methods and also by ensuring what constitutes good academic practice. “Messages of good habits need to be reinforced throughout the period of study, including through using formative assessment, and especially when students are introduced to new forms of assessment” (QAA, 2012, p.25).

Piloting of ePortfolio for the purpose of this research is done on an undergraduate Technical English module called English for Special Purposes. The aim of research is to introduce ePortfolio as a pedagogical tool to prevent plagiarism, as it is one of the authentic ways to assess the students’ performance during the course. In addition, introducing the learners to such a formative assessment using ePortfolios could stimulate the learners to engage in reflective thinking and encourage autonomous learning.

In short, ePortfolio is introduced in English for Special Purposes module to:

- provide the learners with an opportunity to assess their growth and progression and also showcase their achievements during the course.
- encourage the learners to reflect on their own learning process.
- guide the learners step by step with a formative feedback mechanism and discourage them from plagiarizing the contents of their coursework.
- promote student-centred learning, and learner-autonomy.

2. Literature Review

Previous studies have identified the benefits of using ePortfolios in higher educational institutions such as providing an effective mechanism to encourage students to reflect on their own learning process and for tutors to give feedback, and also promoting an active learning process. Thus, students, while creating an ePortfolio are actually involved in the process of planning, collecting data, analyzing and synthesizing ideas, designing the layout of their ePortfolio as well as evaluating and reflecting on their own learning process. (Lorenzo & Ittleson, 2005 a; Buzzetto-More, 2010). Most of the studies have defined ePortfolios based on the purpose of its use. It is potentially regarded as a tool that can facilitate “reflective, collaborative and lifelong learning” and allow students to display their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject (Beresford & Cobham, 2010). Maher and Gerbic have categorized ePortfolios into three types: a learning portfolio, a showcase portfolio, and an assessment portfolio (as cited in Yousuf & Tuisawau, 2011).

The current research relates to the use of ePortfolios for learning and assessment purposes in an undergraduate course. An assessment ePortfolio includes a variety of digital records that represent students’ learning such as students’ self-reflection of their learning process and
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experiences, as well as feedback from tutors and peers on their coursework (Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005b). Such an ePortfolio is introduced as an alternative evaluation method where students are expected to document evidence of their competence in the chosen subject during the course (Alexiou & Paraskeva, 2010). The self-reflective task is a key-component of the assessment portfolio that requires students to reflect on and critically evaluate their own work (Cambridge, 2010). Chang (2001, p. 437) compares ePortfolio assessment to traditional assessment methods and claims that this newer form of assessment method is more “real and active” as it focuses not only on the results but also on the process involved. Barrett (2006, p.4) notes that just as students are motivated to use online social networking sites, they could be motivated to use formative electronic learning portfolios to create their own “Academic MySpace” which in turn could promote deep learning, thereby combining technology to both improve and showcase student achievement. Furthermore, using technology changes the way the classroom instruction takes place, as there is a shift from teacher-directed instructional methods to student-directed methods (Abrami & Barrett, 2005).

According to Dalziel (2008) electronic portfolios, in a well planned and carefully structured assessment could be used effectively to present the learning outcomes as well as learning process by taking the learners through the process of planning, drafting, giving feedback, and peer reviewing. The assessor can link ePortfolio submissions to a Turnitin Plagiarism software tool to derive an originality rating and use this data to scaffold the learners, focusing on the individual’s specific learning needs. Thus, ePortfolios could effectively be used to combat plagiarism by raising the learner’s awareness on what constitutes academic cheating. The author in his study claims that plagiarism is largely an issue in higher education due to students’ ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism or due to their lack of time management skills or lack of opportunities and activities provided to develop their own research skills. This is where ePortfolios prove to be effective as a formative assessment tool, as students while creating and developing their own academic ePortfolios can effectively be guided on how to reference, how to do research, paraphrase or summarize texts, thereby developing their research skills through formative feedback from the tutor during the course. Tutor’s feedback also motivates the learners to perform better (Sheen , 2010)).

Though a number of studies have outlined the benefits of using ePortfolios in higher education for teaching and learning purposes, further research is required to determine the efficacy of the use of ePortfolios as an assessment tool to combat plagiarism. The efficacy and effectiveness of ePortfolios as an assessment tool could depend on how well it is implemented and also on the response of the particular group of students and their attitudes towards using ePortfolios for assessment purposes. This leads curriculum designers to ponder on the inevitable question: How could ePortfolios be used in higher education not only for learning purposes but also as an assessment tool to effectively combat plagiarism?

Therefore, this research paper focuses on the benefits of using e-Portfolios in English for Specific Purposes Module to undergraduate EFL students, and also attempts to measure the effectiveness of using ePortfolios as a formative assessment tool to combat plagiarism. It also attempts to provide an insight into students’ attitudes and experiences in creating and developing an ePortfolio as part of their coursework assignment. The sample group selected for this study was
an ESP class of 26 learners who were distributed a questionnaire and their collective responses from the questionnaire and interviews formed the basis of this research.

The findings would provide information on the benefits of ePortfolio and its veritable role as a formative assessment tool in an EFL environment in institutions of higher education.

3. Aims and objectives

The aim of the study was to enhance student learning by introducing ePortfolios to ESP learners at undergraduate level and address the gap in literature, where there was not much research done on the use of ePortfolios as a formative assessment tool to combat plagiarism.

Research questions
1. What are the benefits of creating and developing an ePortfolio for an ESP course?
2. How is an ePortfolio useful as a learning tool?
3. How does ePortfolio as a formative assessment tool prevent plagiarism?

Rationale for introducing ePortfolios in formative assessment (Figure 1): Since it is technology based, it motivates the learners to use e-portfolio with more enthusiasm, and it may prompt them to use the electronic system more frequently.

Students can create their own ePortfolio using free applications such as Evernote and upload their weekly tasks, worksheets, videos, assignments and other evidence to show their progress in due course. Since class time is not adequate to give individual feedback, the e-portfolio helps the tutor to monitor the students’ progress and give corrective feedback to meet their learning outcomes. In addition, one of the learning outcomes introduced in ePortfolio is a self-reflective task where the learners are expected to reflect on their learning progress and development during the course.

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**Figure 1. Rationale for introducing ePortfolio in formative assessment**
4. Background and context

E-Portfolio was introduced in ESP 10001 module, offered as part of an Engineering programme at a private college in Oman. The college offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Engineering and Business Management Studies. Undergraduate students are required to complete the General Foundation Programme spanning a year before choosing their specialized courses. ESP is offered to UG students in semester 1 who must have completed GFP or have an IELTS score of 5.5 or equivalent to pursue the undergraduate courses.

English for Specific Purposes is a 100% course work module with the ePortfolio contributing to an overall of 10% through various tasks aimed at improving the students’ academic writing and research skills. After assessing the efficacy of various applications, EVERNOTE was selected as a suitable application for ESP module offered in the first semester of undergraduate programme where the students had to choose ESP module as part of the course requirement. A successful completion of ESP module prepares the learners to be better equipped with research skills required for writing assignments and project reports in engineering courses.

Creating an ePortfolio: Creating an ePortfolio is a simple process. Students need to follow the steps as given in Figure 2.

1. Download an application called Evernote. Create User ID and password to sign in

2. Create a Notebook (ESP 10001) and share the link with your tutor by email.

3. Set up your files, folders and tags
   Upload your documents (Weekly tasks, audio / video files, notes)

*Figure 2. Creating an ePortfolio*
Figure 3 presents a snapshot of an ESP ePortfolio created by a student during the course.

![Figure 3. An example of student ePortfolio](image)

**Contents of ESP ePortfolio:** As per the syllabus, the portfolio had 7 components such as self-introduction, research proposal, questionnaire, reading and summarizing from the text, summarizing journal articles, reflective writing and note-taking. The electronic portfolio was assessed for 100% and it contributed to 10% of the overall coursework grade as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Contents of an EPortfolio in ESP (10001)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.NO</th>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Week(s)</th>
<th>% of Marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>About yourself</td>
<td>A paragraph (100 words)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research Proposal</td>
<td>Proposal (Group Project)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Group project Questionnaire</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reading Skills (from the text)</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(5x5=25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Summarizing Journal Articles</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>(10x2=20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Reflective Writing</td>
<td>200-250 words</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reflect on the research topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How is it useful in Oman?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- What are its future implications?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Comment on what you have learnt in your ESP course.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How are the skills that you have learnt useful in your specialization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Note-taking</td>
<td>Lecture Notes</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Electronic portfolio was introduced for the first time for ESP module and the students used ePortfolio mainly for getting formative feedback from the instructor on the components of group project report such as writing a research proposal, questionnaire, or a self-reflective report. Though the digital portfolio is introduced in the week 3 of the 15 weeks semester and the actual assessment begins from week 5. It was introduced as part of formative assessment in order to replace the traditional paper-based portfolios, which proved to be ineffective in the past as students could resort to plagiarizing part or most of its contents. Generally, at undergraduate level, students are required to submit all their coursework assignments through Turnitin, an anti-plagiarism software programme that is integrated with MOODLE to detect plagiarism. As per the institution’s policy, the total similarity of the assignments submitted from the sources put together should not exceed 30% and similar material in any form of student work from a single source should not exceed 7% (MEC, 2018).

At the time of implementation, the students were not enthusiastic about the change in the assessment method as they were used to paper-based portfolios in GFP and in other modules and hence their initial response was not all that encouraging. Once the students became familiar with the ePortfolio application (Evernote), their response was more positive as they began to have a clear understanding of the purpose and the potential benefits of showcasing their work in a digital format.

The findings of this research paper are from the survey taken in the academic year 2016-2017 (Fall Semester) by piloting ePortfolio in an ESP class with the total strength of 26 learners, consisting of 15 male and 11 female, full time students, aged 19-23.

As the initial deployment of ePortfolios in ESP in 2017 was successful, the academic staff from Centre for Language Studies (CFS, MEC) are currently exploring the possibilities of introducing electronic portfolios in other English modules to provide similar learning support during the course.

5. Methodology

The study was carried out in two stages using a mixed research methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative survey tools.

The first stage involved collecting quantitative data using a questionnaire distributed to the target group of 26 learners doing ESP (10001) module. In the second stage of the survey, qualitative data was gathered from interviews with students and the corresponding module instructor to discuss the use of technology aided ePortfolio, its potential benefits and its overall effectiveness as a formative assessment tool to combat plagiarism.

Research instruments used for data collection:

The focus of the qualitative and quantitative survey questions were on the following:

- the purpose of ePortfolios.
- ePortfolio as an assessment tool.
- students’ attitude towards using ePortfolio as a learning tool
- students’ digital skills.
- support given by the module instructor during the course (feedback mechanism/
scaffolding).

- the potential benefits or advantages of using ePortfolios as perceived by the faculty.
- issues faced by the learners while using the electronic system.

Student questionnaire: A questionnaire was designed to assess students’ experience and attitudes towards creating and developing an ePortfolio as part of the formative assessment. The questionnaire had a total of 8 questions with 5 closed multiple choice questions (questions 1-5) and three open-ended questions (7-9) as given in Table 2.

Table 2 Student questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How many hours did you spend every week working on your electronic portfolio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is the primary purpose of using electronic portfolio for this course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent do you think the ePortfolio has helped you with the ESP course in terms of learning and assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What were the multimedia tools used for creating your electronic portfolio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Would you continue to use your ePortfolio after the completion of your course?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What do you like about the ePortfolio activity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What were the issues faced while creating and developing your ePortfolio?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Suggest a subject module where e-portfolios could be introduced to support your learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student interviews: One-to one student interviews were conducted to find out student attitude towards using ePortfolios as a learning and assessment tool, and how it helps to combat plagiarism, the support provided by the module instructor during the course and the difficulties faced during the course.

Faculty Interviews: The module Instructor of ESP was interviewed to find out the efficacy of using ePortfolios, the instructor’s experience, as well as the challenges faced while implementing the new assessment method.

6. Findings
6.1 Quantitative survey (questionnaire): 26 learners, from the ESP class doing their UG programme in Engineering completed the questionnaire during the course and their responses are given below.

The data provides valuable insights into the use of ePortfolios as a learning and assessment tool as perceived by the learners.

a. Number of hours spent by the students in creating and developing the ePortfolio: The majority of students indicated that they spent about 2-3 hours on an average in a week to collect evidence for their learning and store it in digital format (refer to Figure. 4).
b. **Students’ feedback on the purpose of having an electronic portfolio for the course:** The majority of the respondents (76%) agreed that it prevents plagiarism, for the electronic feedback mechanism gave them an opportunity to re-write and re-submit their work based on the tutor’s feedback. All the respondents confirmed that it has helped them to organise the course work better and has also improved their digital skills (Figure 5).

![Figure 5. Learners’ feedback on purpose of an ePortfolio](image)

C. **Advantages of using an e-portfolio as perceived by the learners:** The majority of students felt that their digital skills have improved as a result of using an ePortfolio during the course for weekly submission of their assignment. Their comments ranged from enhancing their digital skills to learning certain skills for the first time like using advanced features of MS word or downloading videos or audios while creating their ePortfolio (Figure 6).
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**Figure 6.** Enhancement of Digital skills as perceived by the learners

**Figure 7.** Use of ePortfolios in other modules

d. **Using ePortfolio in other modules:** The majority of students indicated that they would ‘definitely’ recommend the use of ePortfolio as an assessment tool in other modules. About 10 out of 26 remained neutral as they said they would ‘probably’ recommend its use in other Engineering modules. Only 2 students out of a total 26 were not in favor of using ePortfolio as an assessment tool (Figure 7).
6.2. Qualitative Survey
Student Voices (n=26)

Students were also interviewed on a one to one basis to know about their views on using ePortfolios for future assessments. The majority of students expressed the view that ePortfolio is useful in many ways (Fig.8).

Their views included the following:

- It is a useful tool to get the tutor’s feedback and reflect on our progress.
- It is also easy to use.
- Useful for organizing files using folders and tags.
- Multiple file upload option saves time.
- Electronic portfolio replaces the USB.
- ePortfolio allows authorization, as one can decide who can access the folder.
- One can synchronize the application (e.g. Evernote) with multiple devices and hence it is accessible anywhere.

Figure 8. Benefits of using ePortfolio
Some issues with the use of ePortfolios as pointed out by the students: Though majority of the students (74%) indicated that they did not face any difficulty in creating an ePortfolio and indicated that they liked the idea of using ePortfolio as an assessment tool for their coursework. However, about 26% of the students mentioned that it requires fast Internet connectivity and that it is also time consuming.

Some of the drawbacks pointed out by the students as given in Figure 9:
- It’s not helpful when there’s no Internet.
- Difficult to use it.
- It doesn’t work if the Internet connection is slow.
- It takes time to organise the files.

Figure 9. Drawbacks in using ePortfolios

6.3 Teacher’s Feedback

Student response to the ePortfolio is positive and hence it is likely to be introduced in other modules as well. It also facilitates better feedback mechanism, as it is easier to monitor the learners’ work, and give timely feedback. This also gives them an opportunity to review and resubmit their work. Hence, there is scope for re-correcting or reformulating. This method has considerably reduced plagiarism as evident in the percentage of similarity of the group assignments submitted via Turnitin. Moreover, it integrates their formative assessment with non-formal learning evidence.

Figure 10 presents Turnitin percentage of similarity of group reports submitted at the end of the course after being given formative feedback on their coursework using ePortfolio. The class that submitted its group assignment using ePortfolio demonstrated a considerably lower Turnitin similarity percentage (between 11-20%) as compared to the previous semesters involving traditional paper-based portfolio assessment where the Turnitin percentage of similarity was much higher.
7. Conclusions:

This study hopes that ePortfolio can cater to the general needs of students from all disciplines at higher education. However, the target of this research was limited to undergraduate level students enrolled in ESP course and hence it may need to be customized as per the requirements of other disciplines.

The findings indicated that ePortfolio can effectively be used to enhance the learning process through feedback and interactions between the teachers and students. Teachers could provide learning support through the use of such technology to discourage students from plagiarizing their assignments through constant monitoring and also by means of a structured, formative feedback mechanism. The findings also reflect Dalziel’s (2008) claims that a blended solution using ePortfolios with plagiarism detection software like Turnitin could effectively combat plagiarism.

The results have revealed that there is room for further improvement and the proposed enhancement of the application are listed below.

*Proposed Enhancement:* Electronic Portfolios could effectively be used to promote active collaborative learning, self-reflection and critical thinking by means of:

- developing an institutional ePortfolio systems customized for its own use, and providing a link to integrate it with Moodle to have single sign-on functionality (Kent et al. 2010).
- introducing a blog feature or a forum for feedback from tutors and peers.
- promoting e-portfolio as an effective career tool to showcase skills, knowledge and experience to their potential employers.

8. Future research

The sample size was limited to 26 students of ESP class in the survey. Future research should target a larger sample size and the survey could be administered to a larger number of participants through the use of online survey tools like survey monkey.
Though the response from the majority of students was positive, the survey results indicated some limitations in using ePortfolios such as difficulties faced by the students during the course such as coping with the use of the new technology, and the time taken to master the digital skill. Probably, with more guidance and practice, students can overcome some of these difficulties when they become more familiar with the use of technology. A short training course or a workshop could be given to the students before introducing ePortfolios. Further research needs to address these issues regarding the use of ePortfolios as a formative assessment tool, and provide solutions to improve students’ performance and encourage learner autonomy through such blended learning methods.

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Effective Use of Benchmarking: The Context of the Centre for Preparatory Studies in Oman

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Abstract
This paper examines the importance and the process of developing benchmarks for the courses offered at the Centre for Preparatory Studies, Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. Benchmarks are necessary for improving the quality of instruction. Considering the importance of benchmarking and taking it as a point of reference, a small study was undertaken at the Centre for Preparatory Studies to develop benchmarks for each course offered in the General Foundation Program. One of the aims of developing benchmarks was to make it clear to students what is expected of them at the end of each course. The study draws on some examples of benchmarking models to draft benchmarks for the purpose of study. The exploratory method was followed for gaining insights to write benchmarks. Literature review showed that course objectives are used synonymously with benchmarks. The outcomes of the research project played a significant role in designing curricula for the GFP courses though it was quite a challenging task. It is important to draft concise and clear benchmarks, which are accessible and comprehensible for students and teachers. So, using the level-specific proficiency descriptors, can-do statements for each skill benchmarkers were written to make it comprehensible for students to know what is expected of them by the end of each course. Benchmarks used in one context may not be effective in other contexts. One important insight gained was what benchmarking is and what it is not.

Key words: benchmarks, challenges, implementation, objectives, standards

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Introduction
In education, especially in second and foreign language instruction in particular, Benchmarking is the trend of the day. In education, it takes place when measurable standards are set for learning. For example, benchmarks might be set for the targets that educators expect students to master in each course.

They might also be used to see where a particular student, class, or even an institution ranks in comparison to others. (Canadian Language benchmarks, 2012). To define the concept, Language Benchmarks standard is an expressive scale of language ability in English as a second language (ESL). Advancement of the knowledge and skills that underlie basic, intermediate and advanced ability among adult ESL learners are reflected by the standards set. (Cambridge ESOL, 2011).

The Language Centre was restructured and renamed as the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) in 2016. The Intensive English Language Proficiency (IELP) Program replaced the General Foundation Program (GFP), which was offered in the Language Centre. This change necessitated a revision to the curriculum to meet the changing needs of the students and the stakeholders. While redesigning the curriculum, the need for benchmarking was noticed. Consequently, a small-scale study was taken up with the aim of developing benchmarks for the GFP courses.

Concept of benchmarking
As a first step, to understand the concept better, various definitions given in the literature were reviewed. According to Keegan & O'Kelly (2012), Benchmarking is a way of helping organizations to compare themselves against others in order to learn from others. For Fisher (1996), the purpose of benchmarking was to establish points of measurement from which one can improve corporate performance by changing the way one does things. Benchmarking was a valuable business improvement technique.

According to Zairi (1998), the essence of benchmarking was to encourage continuous learning and to lift organizations to higher competitive levels. Bogan and English (1994) used two terms, benchmarking and benchmarks. According to them, Benchmarking is the ongoing search for best practices whereas benchmarks are measurements to gauge the performance of a function, operation, business related to others.

From the above said definitions, it is clear that benchmarking is viewed by professionals from different perspectives. However, the common features identified are comparing oneself with others, points of references, a valuable technique and it is a continuous process for improvement. The CPS examined these common factors from which arose some concerns.

Significance of the Study
The significance of the study stems from four considerations:
1. Study may improve the quality of instruction in GFP courses offered at the CPS.
2. Students will know what is expected of them by the end of each semester.
3. Students can view their progress from their performance
4. Teachers will know where we stand and what to do to meet the goals.
Any study undertaken requires a sound theoretical base/foundation, discussion of the models in use and the literature related to it reviewed, on the basis of which the results and insights gained can be generalized.

**Theory of benchmarking**

This exploratory study on developing benchmarks for the GFP courses is based on the ten principles from Meade’s theory (1998) of benchmarking. “Learning from the best is the first step towards becoming the best.” (Meade, 2007). He says. According to his theory, Benchmarking:

1. Improves practices, services or products
2. Involves learning about ‘best practices’ from others
3. Accelerates the rate of progress and improvements
4. Contributes to continuous quality management
5. Is an ongoing process
6. Promotes fresh and innovative thinking about problems
7. Provides hard data on performance
8. Focuses not only on what is achieved, but on how it is achieved
9. Involves the adaptation, not merely adoption, of best practices
10. Results in the setting of specific targets

**Literature review**

The focus of literature review was on what has been done in the area of benchmarking and to draw insights from them for the framework for our study. The ultimate purpose of benchmarking was to provide a basis for monitoring the quality of education.

To be successful and to ensure positive outcomes, benchmarking must be approached with some insight into the potential challenges and problems that may arise. (Wilson, 2000). Potential challenges include the need to ensure viable outcomes. (Wilson, 2000).

There are many types of benchmarking and many ways of categorizing these types. Different authors with different meanings use some terms. Each type seems useful for a particular situation. However, the type of benchmarking is not as important as that the aims are clear, achievable and achieved.

Benchmarking provides a professional foundation of shared philosophical and theoretical views on language ability that informs language instruction and assessment. It provides a common national framework for describing and measuring the language ability of ESL learners for instructional and other purposes, assuring a common basis for the development of programs, curricula, resources and assessment tools, which can be shared by professional across the nation. In short, it helps the professional field to articulate ESL needs, best practices and accomplishments. (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

In Canada, American Universities Data Exchange is used for benchmarking. Professionals in charge of benchmarking visit the benchmarked institutions to examine the practices, which led to its superior performance. Then return to incorporate positive factors and reduce inhibiting ones.
so that the identified best practices can be adapted and implemented within the University context; one can observe that institution individualizes it, and it is self-selective in determining specific processes to benchmark. It tends to be ad hoc in nature, informal in approach, and ‘grass roots’ in generation (Benchmarking in Higher Education A study conducted by the Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service. 1998).

In the UK, the term benchmarking is also commonly applied to an approach where a series of ‘contextualized’ benchmarks are created for schools according to various background factors. This approach allows schools to crudely compare themselves to other schools with similar pupil intakes to their own.

The National Association of College and University Business Officers of the United States launched a benchmarking project in 1991. Australian Universities, Vocational Education, and Training Institutions have been able to participate in the project since 1995. The functional benchmarking activities include,

(a) Participation in data collection workshops designed to increase institutions’ understanding of benchmarking;
(b) To assist institutions in interpreting data definitions in common;
(c) To help institutions organize the process of data collection and survey completion;
(d) The post-data-collection workshops assist institutions to understand how to analyze benchmarking results;
(e) How to research best practices and how to apply the tools and techniques of business process redesign to higher education. (Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development, 2011).

We have also examined a few models of benchmarking to adapt them in our study.

Models of Benchmarking
The review of literature has frequently cited benchmarking models. We reviewed three models to understand the process of benchmarking.

Camp Model (1989) has four stages, which are planning, analysis, integration and action. There are several steps under each stage thus making the model crowded. In addition, there is no room for flexibility to make changes as required in any context.

Generic “Meta-Model” (1994) depicted by Anderson and developed by International Benchmarking Clearinghouse (IBC). Though this model also has four stages which are, plan, collect, analyse and adapt, information provided in this model is very little. There is flexibility built in the model for restricting the model. Circular model developed by Spendolini (1992) has five stages. These are; determine what to benchmark, form a benchmarking team, identify benchmarking partners, collect and analyse benchmarking information and take action. It is premised in the concept of re-cycling to project continuous improvement.

Each of these models have shown benchmarking as a continuous process with each phase being critical to the successful implementation of the process. These models in the literature review
showed benchmarking to be a planned, formal, and a structured process. Further, there should always be some flexibility built into any process or model to accommodate situational variation. The main stages in arriving at benchmarks are planning, identifying benchmarking partners, collecting data, analyzing and taking action. In addition to following these stages and various steps under each stage, we have also examined CEFR common reference scales for all skills.

**The Context**

Following the decision of the Higher Education Council No. 13/2008, HE the Minister for Higher Education issued Ministerial Decision No. 72/2008 stating that all public and private higher education institutions operating in the Sultanate of Oman should adopt the General Foundation Programs. The deadline for the adoption of these standards is the academic year 2009-2010 (Oman Accreditation Standards for General Foundation programs Document, 2009). Oman’s Academic Standards set the minimum requirements that programs of study are expected to attain. Their primary focus is on student learning outcomes; and based on the result of carefully planned and executed formal programs of study.

Pan-sectoral working groups comprising national and international academicians developed these standards. The process involved national and international benchmarking, a review of past and current national experience, and extensive public consultations including a major symposium held at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU workshop handout, 2006).

The framework for the study was based on the above review of literature and the models discussed. The focus of this paper is to explain the process of benchmarking at the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS) and the insights gained for enhanced quality of teaching.

**General Foundation Program (GFP)**

GFP is a formal, structured program of study licensed in the Sultanate of Oman. The CPS has designed the GFP course to prepare students for their postsecondary and higher education studies. GFP is general in disciplinary scope, preparing students for a wide variety of subsequent postsecondary and higher education program options. It does not result in the awarding of formal academic credit to the student.

**Language Centre/Centre for Preparatory Studies**

Language Center has undergone a huge transformation ever since its inception in 1986. From time to time, it has improved the quality of instruction and kept itself updated with the changing paradigms. In June 2016, it gained a new status as the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS), which meant shouldering bigger responsibilities and meeting bigger challenges, as it would now include Math and IT in addition to English language teaching.

The Foundation Program English Language (FPEL) curriculum is a part of a larger foundation programme curriculum, which was implemented at SQU in fall 2010. The FPEL consists of six proficiency levels. Each level has its own set of learning outcomes and materials with a gradual increase in difficulty from one level to the next. These six levels are seen as a continuum based on the
developmental nature of language learning which entails a lot of recycling and reinforcement throughout the learning process.

**Developing Benchmarks for the FPEL Program**

Before embarking on developing benchmarks for the FPEL program at the CPS, the Centre looked at the standards set by the TESOL organization (Kuhlman & Knezevic., 2013), and identified the following areas: logical reasoning, critical thinking, problem-solving; inferencing; interpreting; analyzing; applying; evaluating; creativity; and promoting autonomy for considering while benchmarking skills. Next, we used the GFP standards and the TESOL standards as a point of reference to draft benchmarks for the FPEL program at the CPS. In this process, we also considered several other factors, for example, needs analysis of students and other stakeholders (Carroll, M. 2006), adapting CEFR references for different levels and drafting level descriptors followed by writing Can-do statements for each area/skill.

The CPS examined the common reference levels, which are also known as global scales, described in the CEFR (Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Structured View of all CEFR Scales, 2011). Then qualitative aspects of each were examined, for example, spoken language use, reading comprehension etc. After critically examining the common reference scales of the CEFR, the CPS team working on benchmarking also gathered data on the needs of students, colleges and administration (Carroll, M. 2006).

Learning outcomes were then drafted for each skill in/at/for each level (Appendix A) using as reference points the common reference levels of CEFR, needs analysis data, TESOL standards and the GFP standards. Finally, keeping in forefront these learning outcomes, level descriptors were developed and used as benchmarks (Appendix B). The Can-do statements supported and made it easy for students to comprehend the benchmarks. (Appendix C)

**Challenges faced while assessing and implementing level descriptors**

Assessing students working in-group work posed a challenge because of one or two students the others in a group. This resulted in thinking of different methods to assess student’s work done individually, in pairs, in groups, in class, in labs, in library and at home. This resulted in exploring a variety of ways to assess students’ progress from time to time.

The assessment results resulted in resetting the curriculum differently in fall and spring semesters. Student understanding of the benchmarks challenged us to come up with a rephrased list of benchmarks. Consequently, Can-do-Statements list was developed. Similarly, the Centre also revised the criteria for assessing students’ work.

**Conclusion & Insights gained**

The whole process of developing descriptors to use as benchmarks and piloting them took a couple of years to overcome the challenges and to standardize the benchmarks. In this process, it became clear that benchmarks needed to fit into the context of teaching and learning. Moreover, the key phrase in the whole process was ‘Adapt and then Adopt’. Benchmarking is a step forward to progress. However,
it is not ranking, not a competitor, not spying and least of all not a research or a tradition. Then, what is benchmarking? It can definitely be described as context specific and constant revisions for growth.

Dr. Meenalochana Inguva has a PhD in Teacher Education and has 33 years of teaching experience at various levels. She has published books and articles. She has presented at national and international conferences. Classroom based research is her interest. Currently she is working as Standing Member of the Central Curriculum Committee, CPS, SQU, Oman. ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0620-5077

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Appendix A: Reading: Sample-Learning outcomes for FP courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Learning Outcomes</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>Level 5</th>
<th>Level 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Read and respond to a text of an appropriate length, for each level, in a given period of time</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Develop reading fluency and speed by regularly reading extensively outside the classroom via graded readers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Demonstrate acquisition of both general and level-specific academic vocabulary through a range of strategies</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Predict the content of a text using the title and visual prompts</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Show understanding of instructions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Skim a text for the main idea</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Scan a text and demonstrate comprehension of specific information</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Use personal experience and background knowledge to understand texts</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Deduce the meaning of words from context</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Identify pronouns and their references</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Identify parts of speech and their functions in a text</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Identify the character, plot and setting in fiction(wherever applicable)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Make inferences based on information in a text</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Identify the purpose of a text using topic sentences and introductory paragraphs</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Distinguish between main ideas and supporting details</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Interpret graphically presented data (maps, charts, graphs, tables)</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Identify the relationship between textual and graphical information</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Transfer relevant information from a text to a table/outline</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Identify ideas expressed in compound and complex sentences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Create notes from a text</td>
<td>✓✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Identify the writer’s point of view</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Recognize logical relationships within and between sentences</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Distinguish between facts and opinions</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Summarize short texts</td>
<td>✓✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Use knowledge of word formation (prefixes, suffixes and roots) to comprehend a text</td>
<td>✓✓ ✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Identify arguments for and against a certain issue in a text</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Identify attitude and point of view in fiction where applicable</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Read texts broadly relevant to the student’s area of study (minimum 450 words per text) and respond to questions that require analytical skills, e.g. prediction, deduction</td>
<td>✓✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Appendix B: CPS English Language Proficiency Level descriptors

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L6</td>
<td>Can understand texts of at least 450-500 words with an FK 10-12 level of difficulty. Can respond to questions requiring analytical skills including prediction, deduction and inference. Can understand different academic and literary genres, including arguments, complex ideas and/or plots. Can follow the signposts of a lecture and take or complete detailed notes using symbols and abbreviations. Can distinguish fact from opinion and draw conclusions using implicit information. Can produce a research report of 500 words showing evidence of research, note-taking, revision, paraphrasing, summarizing, in-text citations, attributions and use of references. Can actively participate in discussions relevant to their studies, defend opinions and use persuasive language to express one’s point of view. Can deliver a 5-7 minute presentation on a research topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L5</td>
<td>Can understand texts of FK 8-9 level of difficulty by predicting the gist of a text using textual and visual clues, making use of knowledge of word formation, recognising ideas, making inferences, and identifying specific information. Can produce organized notes using abbreviations and symbols effectively. Can understand the main points of texts related to their academic fields. Can produce organized, coherent essays of at least 250 words on a variety of guided topics showing evidence of paraphrasing, note-taking and control of layout. Can express ideas, opinions in a conversation on a topic relating to their studies, using appropriate interaction strategies and topic specific vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L4</td>
<td>Can respond to texts of FK 6-7 level of difficulty, applying the sub-skills of using contextual clues to make inferences, identifying the attitudes of the speakers, and distinguishing facts from opinions. Can complete outlines or write notes based on listening texts using some symbols and abbreviations. Can produce a revised, connected text of at least 150 words on familiar or guided topics, stating reasons or providing examples where appropriate. Can maintain a general conversation and use appropriate communicative strategies and language functions in both formal and informal contexts. Can deliver a 3-5 minute presentation on a research topic.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Can I Do the Following?

Put a √ if you can; or a X if you haven’t learnt it yet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Can I . . . ?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LISTENING</strong></td>
<td>Use symbols and abbreviations to take notes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use the context to understand what the speaker means?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify the opinion or attitude of the speakers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand the difference between facts and opinions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell the difference between main ideas and supporting details?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand information given directly and indirectly?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use expressions like for example / secondly / however, etc. to understand the flow of ideas in a talk?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Appendix C: Can-Do Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>READING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognize the difference between fact and opinion when I read?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand information given directly and indirectly in a passage,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>graph or table?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize short passages to identify main ideas?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify sentences that either support or oppose a certain issue in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a passage?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can understand relationships between sentences, and within sentences?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKING</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Express my opinion, and ask for other people’s opinions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss topics in my studies by asking questions, agreeing or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disagreeing, asking for making something clear, and sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present an argument and support it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuade someone to do something?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand information in tables, pictures, notes, maps and graphs,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and explain it to someone?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use question forms (e. g. Who? / Which? / Do? / Did? etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDY SKILLS / RESEARCH PROJECT</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe my learning experiences, challenges and thoughts in a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>portfolio?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take notes using a systematic note-taking technique?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a glossary of key words?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find specific information on the Internet?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use an online catalogue to locate a book or journal, or find</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information related to a topic?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use a Contents page and an index to locate information in a book?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use my skimming and scanning skills to locate information in a certain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chapter or section?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select or reject a source based on whether it is difficult, relevant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or updated?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand whether a source is reliable, objective (correct) and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authentic (original)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cite a source in the way they do in higher institutions of learning?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRITING</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summarize and paraphrase information (in my own words)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a five-minute presentation using library or online resources, and present it with an outline and visual aids?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluate (make judgements on) my own presentation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraphrase information from a written text, or from tables, pictures, notes, maps and graphs?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce paragraphs with topic sentences and supporting details?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give reasons and provide examples to support them?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select relevant information from texts, and use it?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write essays of at least 250 words, showing control of organization (with an introduction, body and conclusion), punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, grammar and vocabulary?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a report of at least 500 words showing evidence of research, note-taking, paraphrasing, review of work, and use of quotation and references?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male and Female EFL Teachers' Consciousness of Self-disclosure: A Case Study from Al Baha University, Saudia Arabia

Ahmed F. Shoeib
Foreign Languages Department, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Al Baha University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
Teacher self-disclosure (TSD) is a communication strategy that may positively affect students' learning by encouraging them to participate effectively in English as Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom activities. In addition, it can be considered a Second Language (L2) teaching method that can increase learner’s engagement and language learning outcomes. Owning to its context-sensitive and culture-dependent nature, however, TSD topics, purposes, and considerations may vary cross-culturally. This study is an endeavor to investigate EFL University teachers' consciousness of suitability and appropriateness of TSD as well as to find out differences and similarities between male and female EFL teachers' conceptions of the relevance of TSD to successful L2 teaching. In order to achieve these objectives, the Appropriateness of Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale is administered to 60 EFL teachers (30 females and 30 males) from the Foreign Languages Departments at the Faculties of Arts and Humanities of Al Baha University, KSA. Results of the current study refer to the extent to which EFL teachers consider TSD topics, purposes, and considerations to be proper or improper. Moreover, the study finds out concurrence and indifference between male and female teachers' conceptions in topics of TSD, the purposes TSD achieves in classroom settings, and considerations the teachers consider when practicing TSD. The results of the study recommend that EFL teachers can use TSD as a teaching and career development tool to improve learning despite the fact that they should be alert of its influences in some features as TSD is culture and context oriented.

Keywords: EFL, teacher consciousness, teacher self-disclosure

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/MEC1.8
1. Introduction

There are many explanations and descriptions for the term teacher’s self-disclosure. It's better to start with defining self-disclosure to get better understanding of the term. Originally, Jourard (1971) defines self-disclosure as the process when someone makes himself known to others with the attitude, love and trust. Nevertheless, this definition does not show concern to the growth of the relation of the people who are practicing self-disclosure. In accordance with this, generally self-disclosure is reported as an intended action when people reveal ones information, thoughts and feelings to other people (Greene, Derlega and Mathews, 2006).

With regard to teacher’s self-disclosure, Gkonou and Mercer (2016) describe it as teacher’s personal information about his/her experiences and sometimes close relationships to share with the students in an attempt to facilitate introducing the content. Bazarova (2012) describes it as teacher’s voluntary action of disclosing personal and professional information and sharing it with students and colleagues which can lead to building rapport and increased intimacy. Cayanus and Martin (2008) identify three aspects of teacher self-disclosure: amount, relevance and negativity. The amount of disclosure shows how much and how many times teacher uses self-disclosure in class; relevance entails disclosure which is about the theme of discussion in the class; negativity is connected with negative revelation or disclosures to the class.

Researchers of communication education assert that teaching process is primarily a communicative activity in which sender and receiver use verbal and non-verbal messages to negotiate meaning of new messages introduced (Simmonds & Cooper, 2011). Teachers communication with students, how they monitor such communication, impact of this communication on their integrative and instrumental motivation and their overall learning outcomes, and the types of conceptions teachers and students hold have been areas of investigation in learning and teaching research (e.g., Sideling, 2010; Hosek, 2011; Mazer, 2013; She and Fisher, 2002). Titsworth (2012) reports that teachers communicative activities can excessively develop students comprehension and conceptions of influential successful teaching. Witt et al., (2004) in their reflective analysis of the findings of 81 studies on the connection between teachers' verbal or nonverbal instantaneousness and students' learning outcomes report that teachers' verbal immediateness positively correlate with students' successful rated learning and affective learning. In addition to that teacher communication has a remarkable influence on cognitive aspects of learning, his communicative behaviors can increase students’ involvement or contrarily increase their indifference and dissatisfaction with the entire learning process. In this regard, Domenech et al., (2014) indicate that unsuccessful teacher-student communication activities can lead to learners’ feelings of dissatisfaction and less motivation. In line with this, Chory et al., (2014) find that sometimes students' negative feelings of injustice and malfunctioning emotional reactions can be credited to their teacher's inoperative ineffective communication behavior. Mazer et al., (2014) assert that if teachers show poor immediacy and lack for communication competence, students have inappropriate negative emotional reactions. In the same context, Titsworth, Quinlan and Mazer (2010) report that teachers’ influencing communication behaviors can lead to students' positive perceptiveness, sensitivity and awareness of the classroom environment. They sum up that teachers acceptable communication behaviors are those that accumulatively contribute to students' higher or lower level of emotional engagement. Martin and Marsh (2009) indicates that intimacy and support learners receive from their educational environment can increasingly help them
develop skills to work as resilience which enables them to cope with some demanding learning conditions and circumstances.

Emphasizing that teachers should take training in particular communication skills, Norliza et al., (2010) assure that teachers who have communication competences and skills are able to participate in mediated-learning interactional activities, ask more questions, and give fewer disciplinary comments. Scholars like Chory et al., (2014) find that giving personal examples as a communication behavior, using sense of humor, and calling students by their first names can help create a more friendly immediate classroom environment, especially that humor can be the power to engage learners in the learning process as engagement and devotion are usually key factors for success.

With regard to talking to teach course content, teachers usually share information about their experiences, personal stories and beliefs with their students in classrooms (Webb, 2014). Such communication is called teacher self-disclosure. TSD as an influential communicative activity that happens within classroom context which can positively affect student learning and motivation (Cayanus and Martin, 2016). Hosek (2011) clarifies that when teachers self-disclose they talk about their experiences and personal stories that sometimes relevant or irrelevant to the teaching content and give students background knowledge about the teacher that is hard to get from other sources. Serag (2011) studies self-disclosure effect on EFL writing by computers which indicates that teachers can increase learners’ autonomy by using self-disclosure as a facilitative teaching method in the writing course.

Teachers use self-disclosure for a variety of objectives and purposes as building rapport with students, gaining their trust, better clarifying course content and making students more attentive. Scholars studying the notion of TSD recommend the incremental effective role TSD can play in increasing teaching and learning outcomes. Zhang et al., (2008) discuss that TSD can have a positive influence on student-teacher relationship and encourages students to better participate in classroom communication. Tobin (2010) denotes self-disclosure enables teachers to use successful influential teaching practices when it is considered a better verbal choice. Similarly, Sanders (2014) clarifies that teacher self-disclosure is fundamentally important for successful student-teacher relationship and students consider TSD to be an effective classroom communication strategy that can be put into operation in the learning experience.

Research findings indicate that using technology in communication and, building rapport and having good relationships with our students can excessively increase our usage and understanding of teacher self-disclosure. In this context, Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2007, 2009) discover that teachers who use Facebook as a tool for TSD experience higher levels of teacher capacity, dependability, and caring. They contend that students who have a window to TSD on Facebook show higher degrees of motivation. Researchers (e.g., DiVerniero and Hosek, 2011; Gibbs, Ellison, and Lai, 2011) have discuss that when teachers give their students an access to their private information pertinent to the course and funny posts via social networks, students' involvement and teacher trustworthiness remarkably increase.
Other studies found that the use of TSD can be influenced by such factors as the field of study, and the range of different topics. Zhang et al. (2008) argue that teachers of science majors, in comparison with teachers of social science majors, report significantly higher degrees of acceptance of the impact of TSD on classroom participation. In another study, exploring teachers' attitudes toward the use of TSD, Zhang (2010) finds that for three reasons the teachers refrain from disclosing in such topics as beliefs, and religious and political affiliation. The reasons are fear of (1) disagreeing with their students, (2) the possibility of students' having limited understanding or misunderstanding, and (3) the risk of inciting conflicts with parents and the school administration.

Thus, studies on TSD assure that teacher self-disclosure as a communication behavior that is multidimensional is capable of developing learners' participation, increasing effective learning, and enhancing social interactions. Nonetheless, TSD is a culturally oriented and sensitive topic and so it should be used reasonably and reflectively with cautious control and honest responsiveness (Rasmussen & Mishna, 2008; Zhang, Shi & Hao, 2009). The current study is driven by the rarity of studies on TSD in an Arab context. The aim of the study is to examine male and female EFL teachers' consciousness and viewpoints of suitability, convenience and appropriateness of EFL teacher self-disclosure. Accordingly, teachers' consciousness or conceptions of convenience of three aspects of TSD including TSD topics, purposes, and considerations are found out. In addition, an endeavor is made to investigate if there is a significant difference between male and female EFL teachers totaling 60 who are randomly chosen from Foreign Languages Departments at Colleges of Arts and Humanities and Arts Sciences of Alba University, KSA in the academic year 2018. Technically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are male and female EFL teachers' viewpoints of convenience of TSD?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female EFL teachers' viewpoints of convenience of TSD?

2. Review of Literature

Jourard and Jaffee (1970) define self-disclosure as the process by which an individual discloses or reveals information about himself to others. Eckhart (2011) makes clear that self-disclosure refers to information persons reveal about themselves which gives clues to their thoughts, beliefs, experiences and feelings that shapes their personal intimate relationships. Furthermore, Walker (2011) considers self-disclosure as an activity that helps a person to feel satisfied and comfortable in close relationship with others which is a basic requirement for successful social interaction. Nevertheless, one has to be cautious and alert to positive and negative potential consequences when he discloses information about his personal life.

Psychotherapists consider self-disclosure as one of the necessary tools for success in psychotherapy as it helps them in making close relationships with the subjects they are curing Ziv-Beiman (2013). Therefore, if ESL/EFL teacher is going to deal with his students as a counselor, so teacher-student relationship can be enhanced with the help of self-disclosure as a productive facilitative L2 teaching strategy.
In addition, self-disclosure enables the teacher to share his own experiences with students and so he gives them a model of behavior which they can benefit from. Jourard assures that, “I can experience your experience most directly if you disclose it to me” (1971a). As a result of that self-disclosure is a dual relationship; learners can also share information about their experiences, their families and friends with the teacher so as to help them overcome their learning difficulties. Moreover, through self-disclosure, teachers have the opportunity to discover themselves during their communication with the students. Consequently, teachers can select the methods that are suitable for their students’ experiences that have been revealed to the in the process of self-disclosure. Research on student-teacher relationship and communication shows that successful teachers are those able to build a rapport or good relationships with their students so as to enhance the quality of their learning (Wilson & Ryan, 2013).

The topic of Self-disclosure has been tackled in a number of studies in the area of ESL/EFL learning and teaching, and different research findings have been found. Pishghadam and Askarzadeh (2009) examine the effects of teacher’s self-disclosure on students’ speaking performance and levels of anxiety. TSD has been found to be important for success in L2 speaking performance and in having a friendly healthy teacher-student relationship in language learning classroom contexts.

Goldstein and Benassi (1994) investigate the potential relation between self-disclosure and students’ participation in classroom contexts. Their results reveal that there is positive correlation between teacher’s self-disclosure and students’ class participation that is attributed to the intimate teacher-student relationship made by self-disclosure.

In line with this, Hosseini and Tabatabaei (2010) in their study show that using TSD was influential in lowering EFL learners’ anxiety in classrooms. Thus, teacher communication behaviors including TSD are capable of promoting student learning, participation and engagement or contrarily increase their dissatisfaction with the learning process. That’s because, less productive teacher-student communication as indicated by Domenech et al., (2014), results in negative emotions on the part of the learners. In connection with this, Chory et al., (2014) report a number of students’ feelings of injustice and negative emotional reactions can be a result of their teacher's less effective communication behavior. Mazeret et al., (2014) clarify that teachers who do not have immediacy and show poor communication competence, may increase their students negative emotional responses. With regard to the same ideas, it is discovered that teachers’ successful influential communication behaviors are associated with students’ positive conceptions of their classroom environment (Titsworth et al., 2010). They assure that teacher communication competence can be responsible for students’ higher or lower levels of emotional involvement during the learning process.

In accordance with this, Nemattabrizi and Pouyan (2014) in their study trace the influence of Iranian English teachers’ self-disclosure classroom practices on students’ general language proficiency. To this end, after giving a test of language proficiency (TOEFL PBT) to 52 Iranian advanced-level adult EFL learners, they are randomly divided into two control and experimental groups. The experimental group is the teacher-disclosing group in which the EFL teacher shares with the student’s information about her feelings, attitudes and experiences about learning English.
and the profession, while the control group students do not follow this procedure. This treatment lasts for 52 sessions and then both groups are given another version of the TOEFL test as the post-test of the study to find out any improvements in their language performance. The results indicate that teacher self-disclosure can positively affect students’ language proficiency.

Similarly, Zacharias (2014) in his study asserts that classroom teachers decide student classroom participation as they are the ones who direct and control the turn-taking in the classroom. Although classroom teachers are the core of the teaching-learning process, but few studies have examined the role of classroom teachers in specific cultural EFL contexts such as those in Indonesia. The very objective of the study is to discover how teacher talk promotes student classroom participation activities. The researcher collects data through 85 student narratives written as part of a Cross Cultural Understanding (CCU) course assessment in an English teacher preparation program in a private university in Indonesia. During analysis of the student narratives it is found out that the factors related to teacher talk are considered essential and contributing to student classroom participation. They include teachers’ lecturing styles, teachers’ lack of modified input, unfavorable past teacher feedback and teachers’ pedagogical stories. The study refers to the primary role of teacher talk in determining student classroom participation patterns and activities.

Furthermore, sometimes in-service and pre-service teachers differ in their conceptions on the suitability and appropriateness of TSD. Fidel Çakmak and Betül Arap (2013) in their study investigate in-service and pre-service teachers’ perceptions of the appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure in a Turkish context. The study is a replication of that of Zhang, Shi, Tonelson, & Robinson (2009) and included pre-service teachers (n=76) and in-service teachers (n=60) from Turkey. The results reveal statistically significant differences within two groups of teachers in their conceptions of the convenience and appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure in two areas: common topics and uncommon topics. There are no statistically significant differences in three other dimensions; uncommon purposes, common purposes and consideration of students. Both studies have yielded similar results in terms of the perceptions of the purpose of teacher self-disclosure and of the unsuitability and inappropriateness of uncommon topics. Contradicting results are found in the appropriateness of common topics of teacher self-disclosure, uncommon purpose and consideration of students. The study is a contribution to the field as a replica of a previous one with participants from Turkey and it ends up with that the year of experience and teaching context might influence the conceptions of appropriateness of TSD.

Therefore, when teachers use TSD they can help learners develop their rational judgment and so control their classroom emotional responses. On the other hand, when students share information about themselves with the teacher, they have the chance to regulate their emotional reactions to give a space to reasoning to take over. Teachers in their classrooms should encourage and use more metacognitive activities and practices to give students the opportunity to talk freely in class about themselves and so their emotions, listen to their classmates’ feelings, and know about their teacher’s attitudes, beliefs and motivations to teach the target content (Hosek and Thompson, 2009).

Consequently, previous studies on TSD give evidence to that the concept can be used as an effective instructional tool to increase student participation, interest, understanding, and
motivation. On the other hand, as a result of that TSD is sensitive to cultural differences, it should be practiced cautiously and properly with reasonable control and absolute understanding (Rasmussen & Mishna, 2008; Zhang, Shi & Hao, 2009). The current study is motivated by the rarity of research on TSD in an Arab context. The very aim of the study is to identify Arab EFL male and female teachers' viewpoints on the suitability and appropriateness of teacher self-disclosure. Actually, teachers' viewpoints of appropriateness and convenience of TSD topics, purposes, and considerations are explored. Additionally, an endeavor is made to find out if there is a significant difference between male and female teacher’s perceptions on the suitability and convenience of TSD in foreign language classroom contexts.

3. The Context of the Study

The researcher through his experience as an assistant professor in TEFL at the Department of Foreign Language at Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Al Baha University, KSA has noticed that a number of the instructors already use TSD in their classrooms. Research findings show that teachers communicate with students about the content, discuss ideas about the lesson and sometimes share their own experiences in life. (Mazer et al., 2007). That’s to say teachers use self-disclosure as an educational tool in their classrooms through relating information about themselves to the subject’s content they teach.

Furthermore, the aforementioned study findings give details on the effectiveness of TSD in increasing ESL/EFL learner’s autonomy, classroom participation and language learning motivation in a variety of contexts. In addition, Zhang et al., (2009) assure that teachers should identify and evaluate cultural characteristics of their students before they use TSD, gender, emotional responses and their level of the learning. Almost all the above previous studies are conducted in non-Arab contexts and so there is a rarity of research in this area in Arab EFL classrooms. Since TSD is culturally dependent and sensitive to cultural variations, the researcher is motivated to investigate EFL University teachers’ consciousness of the andconvenience, suitability and appropriateness of TSD in Arab foreign language classroom contexts.

4. Methodology

4.1. Participants

The study uses convenience sampling to choose a total of 60 EFL teachers (30 females and 30 males) from five Faculties at Al Baha University, KSA. At the time of the study, the participants, ranging in ages from 26 to 55, had more than five years of teaching single-sex English classes at Foreign Languages Departments at five Faculties. With regard to their qualifications, 40 teachers have MA in TEFL and English translation and 11 teachers have BA in English language and literature. The remaining 9 teachers are six PhD candidates and two PhD holders in linguistics and applied linguistics. They are teaching skill courses, research methods and content area courses to students majoring in English language and literature.

4.2. Instruments

The present study uses an adopted version of the Appropriateness of Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale adopted (Zhang et al.,2009). The 20-item, 5-point Likert scale from 1 (very appropriate) to 5 (very inappropriate) has three dimensions that include the topics of teachers’ self-
disclosure, purposes the teachers use self-disclosure for and considerations teachers take into account when they use self-disclosure. For validity purposes, the researcher submits the questionnaire to six university teachers majoring in applied linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) for revision. The jury members report that the questionnaire items are suitable and valid for the study purposes and objectives. The current study instrument is then pilot tested with five male and five female EFL teachers with characteristics similar to those who take part in the current study. The researcher used Cronbach’s Alpha model to check for reliability of the instrument and the precise Alpha index of 0.79 is obtained for the questionnaire, showing that it is of high reliability. Moreover, for validity of the instrument, the researcher calculates square root of the reliability value and obtains (0.89) which indicates that it is of high validity to be administered to the participants of the study.

In order to collect biographical data about the participants, the researcher adds a section to the questionnaire in which he asks them to write information on their gender, teaching experience, and university degree.

4.3. Data Analysis Approach
The current study uses qualitative-quantitative approach principles (Tashakkori, 2009) to analyze data gathered by Appropriateness of Teacher Self-Disclosure Scale adopted (Zhang et al.,2009). It is administered to 60 Male and female Arab EFL teachers from Al Baha University, KSA to find out their conceptions on the convenience and suitability of TSD in EFL classroom contexts. Data is then statistically analyzed and interpreted to answer the aforementioned questions as the present study does not have hypotheses, but its objectives are fulfilled through giving answers to its questions utilizing the above data analysis method.

4.4. Procedures
The questionnaire is given to 30 male and 30 female EFL teachers who are told about the study objectives and how to accurately respond to its items as it is administered to the participants in five Faculties of Al Baha University, KSA in the academic year 2019/2018. EFL teachers are asked to return the questionnaire in five days to guarantee that they have enough time to fill it out.

5. Results
The study results are interpreted to answer its questions as follows;

Question (1) What are male and female EFL teachers viewpoints of convenience of TSD?

Male and female teachers' viewpoints of convenience/appropriateness of TSD topics
The results, as shown in Figure 1, clarify that male and female EFL teachers view some TSD topics as appropriate and others as inappropriate ones. For example, (93%) of them view relating their personal experiences and stories to be appropriate TSD topics. Contrarily, (33%) of them indicate that sharing information related to their family, relatives and friends is inappropriate TSD topic, while (63%) perceive sharing opinions and talking about their personal interests and hobbies (61%) as appropriate topics. Anyhow, those topics include sharing political views (15%), religious belief (43%) and giving information from their close relationships (13%) are regarded as appropriate TSD topics.
Male and female teachers' viewpoints of convenience/appropriateness of TSD purposes

The results presented in Figure 2 indicate that the teachers view such purposes as using TSD to entertain students (63%), to offer real-world examples (88%), to attract students' attention (77%), to set social role model (78%), to create a comfortable classroom environment (77%), to increase students' learning interests (71%), and to clarify teaching content (82%) are appropriate. Anyway, while only (35%) of the teachers report using TSD to please themselves, more than half of them (54%) think this purpose to be inappropriate. Both male and female EFL teachers consider some TSD purposes as appropriate while others as inappropriate. With regard to the aforementioned mentioned research findings which assert that TSD is a culture-oriented classroom practice, so teachers’ views on its topics, purposes and considerations can vary from a society to another. Therefore, the researcher is motivated to investigate foreign language teachers awareness and consciousness of the suitability, convenience and appropriateness of adopting TSD as directive, facilitative and productive teaching tool. In addition, he examines the potential differences between male and female EFL teachers viewpoints on TSD in relation to topics, purposes and consideration.

Figure 2. Male and female teachers' viewpoints of convenience/appropriateness of TSD purposes
Male and female teachers' viewpoints of convenience/appropriateness of TSD considerations

The results in Figure 3 make clear that teachers are alert to numerous considerations as they decided to use TSD in their EFL classrooms. In other words, 80% of the teachers agree that students' cultural background should be considered when using TSD. Students' feelings and emotions (82%) and their grades or levels (65%) are also viewed as appropriate/convenience considerations. Pertaining to students' gender, 61% of the teachers thought it as an appropriate consideration, while about 30% show that it is inappropriate to take students' gender into consideration when practicing TSD with their students. Thus, male and female teachers are aware of the above considerations which represent students’ characteristics teachers take into account while self-disclosing. The researcher thinks that their consciousness of TSD considerations can make self-disclosure a successful interpersonal communication activity in a mediated classroom context. That’s because, a positive teacher-student communication process depends on mutual trust and credibility, especially, on the part of the teacher as sometimes considered responsible for different forms of student response to TSD.

![Figure 3. Male and female teachers' viewpoints of convenience/appropriateness of TSD considerations](image)

Taken as a whole, the teachers agree on most of the topics, purposes and considerations to be appropriate features of TSD. Some topics, purposes, and considerations, however, are regarded to be inappropriate. Between 57% to 87% of the teachers do not agree with sharing political and religious views, and information about their close relationships. Using TSD to please themselves (54%), and taking into account students' gender (30%) are thought of as the inappropriate characteristics of TSD.

Difference between male and female teachers' viewpoints

*Question (2). Is there any significant difference between male and female EFL teachers' viewpoints of convenience of TSD?*
Results in Table 1 statistically describe the Independent-Samples t-tests to find out differences in viewpoints on the appropriateness of TSD topics. The findings below clarify that there is not a significant difference between male and female teachers in their conceptions on the appropriateness of the items 2, 3, 5, 7 while there is a statistically significant difference in their conceptions of appropriateness of items 1, 4, and 6. In other words, EFL male teachers conceive these items as more appropriate TSD topics.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male and Female Teachers' Viewpoints of Appropriateness of TSD Topics</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers use their personal experiences/stories as TSD topics</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>4.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers use their political perspectives as TSD topics</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teachers use their religious beliefs as TSD topics</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teachers use the information related to their family, relatives and friends as TSD topics</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teachers use information from their intimate relationships as TSD topics</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>2.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teachers use their personal opinions as TSD topics</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Teachers use their personal interests or hobbies as TSD topics</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to EFL male and female teachers conceptions of appropriateness of TSD purposes, the Independent-Samples t-tests results in Table 2 show that teachers viewpoints only significantly differ only in item 5 in favor of male ones.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male and Female Teachers' Perceptions of Appropriateness of TSD Purposes</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Std.</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers use TSD to entertain their students</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teachers use TSD to offer real-world, practical examples</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teachers use TSD to attract students’ attention</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>3.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Teachers use TSD to create positive teacher-student relationships 0.69 3.73 0.31 3.68 58 0.56 0.701
5. Teachers use TSD to set social role models 0.88 4.13 0.57 3.67 58 2.43 0.018*
6. Teachers use TSD to create a class environment comfortable to students 0.87 3.73 0.41 3.80 58 0.38 0.705
7. Teachers use TSD to enhance students’ learning interests 0.86 3.77 0.68 3.48 58 1.23 0.243
8. Teachers use TSD to please themselves 1.16 2.53 1.15 2.64 58 0.61 0.581
9. Teachers use TSD to clarify teaching content 0.87 3.73 0.31 3.90 58 0.99 0.325

Results in Table (3) points out that there is not statistically significant difference in teachers’ conceptions on the appropriateness of considerations that should be thought of when they decide to practice TSD. There are not significant differences in items 1, 2 and 4 which indicate that male and female teachers consider students' grade levels and feelings when they use TSD. On the other hand, there is a statistically significant difference between male and female in item 3 in favor of female ones. Therefore, male and female teachers consider taking into account students' grade levels, feelings and student cultural background when they decide to disclose, whereas they differ in their conceptions of considering student gender.

Table 3

| Male and Female Teachers' Perceptions of Appropriateness of TSD Considerations |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|------|------|-------|      |
|                                 | Std.    | Mean    | Std.    | Mean  | df   | t      | Sig. |
| 1. Teachers consider their students' grade levels | 0.76    | 3.80    | 0.97    | 3.43  | 58   | 1.62  | 0.109 |
| 2. Teachers consider their students' cultural backgrounds | 0.55    | 3.83    | 0.80    | 3.67  | 58   | 0.98  | 0.362 |
| 3. Teachers consider their students' gender | 1.06    | 3.79    | 0.82    | 4.05  | 58   | 2.26  | 0.021*|
| 4. Teachers consider their students' feelings | 0.69    | 3.93    | 0.31    | 3.90  | 58   | 0.24  | 0.810 |

0.05* 0.01**

The current study as a whole indicate similarities and differences between male and female EFL teachers’ viewpoints and conceptions with regard to the topics teachers include in TSD, the purposes and objectives they use TSD for in foreign language classroom in the Saudi context and the considerations teachers are aware of when they use TSD in their teaching.

6. Discussion
Teachers are always responsible for offering teaching environment that is encouraging and contributing to student successful learning (Swan, 2013). Rahimi and Karkami (2015) in their study assert that this kind of environment can excessively increase learners foreign language learning
motivation. Impressive teacher-student communication enhances their cognitive and emotional involvement in the content of the course. Research findings indicate that successful teacher communication behaviors can evaluate student involvement in the learning process. Cayanus, Martin and Myers (2008) in their study report that teacher self-disclosure is an influential teaching tool which remarkably could develop learner’s involvement and participation.

The current study is an endeavor to investigate Arab (Saudi and others) EFL teachers’ consciousness of self-disclosure as a potential effective teaching tool and to find out any significant differences in the viewpoints of male and female ones. The study comes up with that when both teachers decide to use TSD they select various topics including giving information on their personal experiences, interests or hobbies and sharing information about their families and friends. On the contrary, they refuse to disclose information about their political opinions, religious beliefs or their close relationships. The results propose that when teachers choose to practice self-disclosure, they are careful and selective in deciding their communication behaviors. Thus, EFL male and female teachers at Foreign Languages Departments at the Faculties of Arts and Sciences of Al Baha University, KSA are very protective while disclosing information related to their political views, religious beliefs or intimate relationships. This could be attributed to their experiences using TSD as a facilitative teaching tool in other contexts or their colleagues’ reflections and practices related to self-disclosure communication behaviors and their advantages and disadvantages. In accordance with this, Zhang and others (2009) find out that teachers don’t use self-disclosure when they think that it may cause them problems and when they are not sure about its consequences. In relation to results of the current study, Myers and Brann (2009) report that the teachers are unwilling to share with their students information about their political, religious perspectives and close relationships. Zhang (2010) in his study indicate that teachers are unwilling to disclose information on these topics as they regard them risky and sensitive. Furthermore, the present study is in line with Sturgeon and Walker (2009) in their claim that teachers would never agree to talk about private information that could probably put them later in trouble, although it could help students’ learning and participation. The researcher thinks that one possible reason can be it is uncommon to discuss sensitive topics in the Arab classroom settings which are offensive to the students and can make the teaching-learning process more complicated and less productive.

The current study that also finds out that male and female EFL teachers think that it is inappropriate to use TSD as a teaching tool just to please themselves. In this regard, the results are in accordance with some other study findings In this case, the results of the study support the findings of the other researchers (Downs, Javidi and Nussbaum, 1988; Sanders, 2014; Webb, 2014) who report that TSD used in classrooms serves many purposes. In spite of that TSD can have remarkable outcomes in improving student learning and increasing participation, there should be numerous considerations teachers need to be aware of when they choose to share information about themselves with the students to facilitate learning the class content. The study findings make clear that teachers agree on such considerations as students’ feelings, their level and grade, and their gender for successful influential practice of TSD. Accordingly, teachers are selective in their self-disclosure classroom communication behaviors (Rasmussen, and Mishna, 2008). They also realize the benefits and risks of sharing private information with their students which can help them choose the successful effective TSD practices (Petronio, 2002).
The second research question is about the difference between the male and female EFL teachers' conceptions of the appropriateness of TSD topics, purposes and considerations. As a whole, the current study has various findings with regard to the three aspects of TSD. Both types of teachers do not have significant differences in their viewpoints on some aspects of TSD, while they have differences in others as indicated in Tables 1, 2 and 3. That’s to say their views significantly differed for a number of aspects of TSD. Hereof, results of the present study are contradicting some other research findings (Consedine, Sabag-Cohen, and Krivoshekova, 2007; Sprecher and Hendrick, 2004) which explore that female teachers usually share information about themselves with the students more than the male ones. Arab EFL male teachers perceive topics including revealing information about their personal stories or experiences, families and personal opinions as appropriate TSD topics more than the female ones do. Thus, female teachers have the tendency to avoid these topics when using TSD in classrooms; which is normal in the Saudi context which is a conservative society. So, non-Saudi Arab female teachers probably have to bypass these TSD topics. This is in congruence reports that teachers’ choices of what and when to include in TSD is determined by motivation, culture, gender, situation and individual differences. However, the avoidance of these topics by female teachers is a gender-specific difference which shows their aptitude to circle around individual’s world of memories and previous experiences.

With regard to TSD purposes, male EFL teachers think that they use TSD to set social role models to their students more than females did which can also be explained in terms of the more freedom given by families to males in the Saudi society as compared to females. That’s to say social roles expected by the society from males are more than those of females which can be due to cultural restrictions and not formal ones. This is supported by (James, 2009) who shows that almost all teacher self-disclosure aspects are culture-dependent and therefore male and female teachers perceptions of TSD topics, purposes and considerations are bounded by cultural and individual differences. He also adds that male teachers in some societies are not required to show an ideal behavior but an acceptable one, whereas females need to show justifiable moral communication behavior. The current study finds out that there is a significant difference between males and females in their perceptions of the appropriateness of considering students’ gender when practicing TSD in favor of the female ones. So females take into consideration students' gender when they choose to use TSD; which is normal in a conservative society and usually all Arab educational settings have the same orientation when addressing female students. Again, teacher self-disclosure is highly influenced by cultural and individual differences (Rasmussen and Mishna, 2008; Zhang, Shi, and Hao, 2009). Therefore, the researcher is motivated to investigate male and female EFL teachers’ consciousness of the suitability appropriateness of TSD topics, purposes and considerations in the Saudi educational setting.

7. Conclusion

The current study makes clear that teacher self-disclosure is not context-free but context-sensitive or cultural dependent in the sense that subjects’ perceptions of the convenience or inconvenience of topics, purposes and considerations are affected by the educational context. The results of the study propose that Arab EFL teachers at Al Baha University, KSA are very selective in their self-disclosure communication behaviors. Findings of the study indicate that TSD topics the teachers think appropriate include personal experiences or stories, giving information related to their family, relatives and friends, and sharing their personal opinions, interests or hobbies. On the contrary,
the teachers do not agree on TSD topics related to their political and religious beliefs or their close relationships as they believe that they could be misunderstood by students or fired from their jobs. Furthermore, the study clarifies that self-disclosure has various purposes in classrooms which include entertaining students, offering real-world examples, attracting students' attention, setting social role model, creating a comfortable classroom environment, increasing students’ learning interests and clarifying teaching content. Nevertheless TSD has many purposes to serve, male and female teachers do not use them carelessly, accidently or illogically as they consider students’ feelings and emotions, their grades or levels along with their gender when they decide to disclose in their classrooms.

The implication of the present study is that Arab EFL teachers at Al Baha University, KSA should not only focus on fostering the cognitive processes as language teaching has become more of a social activity that heavily depends on successful effective models of classroom communication behaviors. That’s to say, TSD offers students friendly effective and secure learning environment which in turn can excessively affect the cognitive domains of learning and further help them to develop language learning. With regard to findings of the current study, ESL/EFL teachers can use TSD to serve different pedagogical purposes. Notwithstanding TSD benefits and potentials, it has to be used cautiously by the teachers as it is context and culturally-oriented. Therefore, teachers should consider students’ feelings and emotions, grades or levels and gender when they decide to use TSD as a teaching tool to help learners with their foreign language learning endeavors. It is not to say that teachers use customized TSD, but their disclosure has to context specific, culturally oriented and directed by student and course content needs to help develop their life experiences and enhance quality education. Professional development programs given to EFL/ESL university teachers should include successful case studies that utilize TSD techniques and language classroom practices to increase their awareness of the importance and limitations of sharing their personal experiences, stories, interests and relationships with their students to facilitate their learning. The current findings assert that teachers intentionally use self-disclosure as they know when and how to practice it in their teaching. Therefore, TSD may be a valuable instructional method to increase student involvement and participation.

The present study is an attempt to give description of the status of TSD among Arab male and female EFL teachers at the Departments of Foreign Languages at Faculties of Arts and Humanities of Al Baha University, KSA. Future research can deal with the issue in a different cultural educational setting within MENA region countries investigating language teachers TSD usage in other societies in the context of universities and schools in order to find out how pre-university teachers also practice TSD in classrooms. This kind of analysis will be important since TSD is context-dependent and the teaching environment and teacher-student relationship are different in universities from at schools. Future research can explore any possible correlation between TSD and students’ motivation to learn EFL/ESL, as there is still a little known about how self-disclosure as a separate construct may affect learners’ motivation. Furthermore, it would be also logical and meaningful to investigate this potential relationship in online classes or individual courses. It may be possible to mention that when teachers communicate with their students in online courses, they would be likely to reveal and share more information about themselves with the learners. Future research can also investigate if students’ reactions vary in response to different kinds of learning styles. The current study explores teachers’ perceptions of TSD at boys’ classes and girls’ while future research can study mixed classes to know if there are differences in the way teachers use TSD.
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References


A rose by any other name…:
Exploiting any literary text in the ESL/EFL classroom

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Abstract
The paper argues that literature provides authentic materials for developing reading and related language skills in addition to other real world texts (e.g. advertisements, or multimodal texts downloaded from the Internet). Hence, the paper aims to demonstrate how literary texts can be employed in the English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom to facilitate reading, language acquisition, and related critical skills, particularly at the pre-intermediate stage and above. Text selections from popular novels were analysed using Johns and Davies’ (1983) Text as Vehicle of Information (TAVI), and Text as Linguistic Object (TALO), as well as Clandfield’s (2005) Text as Springboard for Production (TASP) as a framework to design language learning/use activities. Source texts were selected from Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day, Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, and Martel’s Life of Pi in view of these novels’ current salience in the literary world to address key research questions: 1) What reading skills and sub-skills can the literary texts help develop among ESL/EFL students? 2) What aspects of grammar and vocabulary can be exploited in the texts? 3) How can the texts be used as reflections of social reality to generate discussion of critical issues among students? The fact that these novels have been produced as films, which the learners could also watch in whole or part, is expected to stimulate further critical appreciation. The paper concludes that the value of such informed use of any literary text is that it exploits the literature-language nexus to provide the synergy needed for student learning in the ESL/EFL classroom and beyond.

Keywords: Developing reading skills, ESL/EFL learning, exploiting literary texts, grammar and vocabulary learning, literature-language nexus

1. Introduction

Literature adds to reality; it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become. (C. S. Lewis, n.d.).

1.1 Literature in the ESL/EFL classroom

Teaching language through literature is an effective means of cultivating the language competencies of ESL/EFL students as it provides ample opportunities for contextualized learning. The use of literary texts as authentic learning materials in the language classroom not only enables students to relate to one another meaningfully using the basic skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, but also the more creative, as well as critical skills of language use in a range of real life discourse types (Savvidou, 2004). This is because students of literature in English come across an enormous range of idioms, grammatical forms and other nuanced linguistic features that are rarely present in abundance in exclusively language-based texts that are often written for use in the classroom. Indeed, the use of literary texts as part of a wide range of texts to teach literacy to primary school children is known to promote creative teaching and learning (Anderson & Styles, 2000).

Based on previous research and commentary on the issue of literature in the ESL classroom (see e.g. Lazar, 1993; McKay, 1982; Picken, 2007; Savvidou, 2004), Dasklovskas and Dimova (2012) list five benefits of using literary texts in that they: 1) provide representational rather than referential materials that enable students to delve into deeper connotative meanings of diverse cultures, 2) promote creative thinking as an omnipresent, everyday phenomenon, 3) are authentic and motivate learners to learn, 4) encourage active learner participation, and 5) inspire learners to read extensively. Lazar (1993) examines similar reasons for using literature in ESL/EFL, and adds that literary text use helps develop students’ interpretative abilities in the forming of hypotheses and making inferences on the basis of textual evidence, for example, whether a particular idiom has been used appropriately, or to what extent a grammatical rule can be generalised. Needless to say, then, with the wider and richer contexts of language use that literature affords, including “access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying” (Lazar, 1993, p. 16), students get to engage with an authentic literary text in diverse ways and thus be able to develop their language competence and critical thinking skills besides being motivated to read extensively (cf. Grellet’s (1981) virtuous cycle of the good reader).

Once motivated to read widely across both literary and non-literary genres, students tend to choose their own texts based on their own interests (Eskey & Grabe, 1988). Bard (2015) also appears to believe that extensive reading based on readers’ instinctive liking is likely to produce better understanding of the language as opposed to an intensive focus on the rigidity of the course books. A further reason for such extensive reading among relatively accomplished readers may be connected with the notion of “intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1980) whereby “all texts contain traces of other texts, and frequently they cannot be readily interpreted - or at least fully appreciated - without reference to other texts.” (Wallace 1992, p. 47). Literary text excerpts used in the ESL/EFL classroom can often be exploited for their intra- and intertextual links in various ways by the teacher to “orchestrate and support a kind of classroom discourse that engenders active student talk that leads to second language learning” (Boyd, 2000, p. 163). For example, The Washington
Post of September 14, 1997, in an article on the death of Princess Diana, refers to her as “the face that launched a thousand tabloids,” quite obviously an allusion to the beauty of Helen of Troy: “Is this the face that launched a thousand ships?” in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (1588) (as cited in Stott, 2001).

1.2 Approaches to Reading
Quite obviously, interacting with written texts, “which focus on the way writers and readers interact” (Hoey, 2001, p. 1; see also Widdowson, 1979), lies at the heart of this paper that highlights reading as a critical language skill, which in turn engenders extended productive practice in a range of language use skills in the classroom and beyond. The general goal of research into the ESL/EFL reading process may be stated simply as investigating how student readers make sense of written language. However, Huey’s (1908) statement about the goals of the psychology of reading better articulates the essence, and the complexity, of this uniquely human faculty:

“to completely analyse what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist’s dream for it would be to describe very many of the most intricate workings of the human mind, as well as to unravel the tangled story of the most remarkable specific performance that civilisation has learned in all its history.” (Huey, 1908, p. 8, as cited in Anderson & Pearson, 1984, p. 37).

This unique faculty is alluded to in this paper for its primacy within the context of developing ESL/EFL skills with the use of literary texts.

Early approaches to reading, both in first language and second language learning settings, viewed the skill as a passive, bottom-up decoding process. The reader was seen as reconstructing the writer’s intended meaning through recognition of the printed letters and words. In other words, the proficient reader was believed to be able to decode the meaning of a given text from these smallest text-based units at the “bottom” to increasingly larger units at the “top” (phrases, clauses and sentence connectors). Accordingly, problems in reading that were perceived in the L2 reader were construed basically as difficulties in the decoding of print to derive its propositional content (Carrell, 1988, pp. 1-2).

The “bottom-up” perspective of reading is known to have been established within the audio-lingual and structuralist approaches to second/foreign language learning that enjoyed considerable support before 1970. Reading (and writing) was viewed essentially as an adjunct to the oral language skills of listening and speaking. The structuralist tradition in linguistics of Fries (1963) and Lado (1964) emphasised phoneme-grapheme relationships and formalised the sound-symbol decoding approach to the teaching-learning of reading skills in ESL/EFL contexts. Even if there was reference to background knowledge, and sociocultural meaning, and how these reader factors might interact with the linguistic meaning of reading texts, such views about reader-text interaction did not exert any appreciable influence on early theories of reading in a second language as “the methodological and institutional focus remained on decoding, or bottom-up processing.” (Carrell, 1988, p. 2). Speaking within the broad context of reading and/or text processing, the mere mention of the “bottom-up” approach is bound to immediately bring to mind competing views about the same process: the “top-down” model and later, the “interactive” model (Stanowich, 1980; 1990).
The origin of views about reading as an active, and interactive (i.e. interaction between writer and reader) process is now well-known to researchers in the field. Goodman (1967, 1971) characterised native language reading metaphorically as a “psycholinguistic guessing game” in that “reading is a psycholinguistic process by which the reader (a language user) reconstructs as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by the writer as a graphic display” (Goodman, 1972, p. 22). Smith (1971) defined the “fluent reader” as a person who can make optimal use of the redundancy in a text, and as one who moves from meanings to words rather than from words to meaning (p. 7).

Coady (1979) reinterpreted Goodman’s model “to see how such an approach relates to the ESL student” (p. 6), arguing that comprehension is the outcome of the interaction among three factors: process strategies, background knowledge, and higher-level conceptual abilities. Beginning readers tend to focus more on process strategies (e.g. recognising words) while more accomplished ones make use of the more abstract conceptual abilities and their background knowledge, using sampling text to predict and confirm information. More recently, Dubin and Bycina (1991) have argued that proficient ESL readers comprehend a text better by “retaining newly acquired knowledge, accessing recorded and stored knowledge, and attending to the writer’s cues as to the meaning intended for the text.” (p. 75).

This paper aims to demonstrate how the constructs of TAVI, TALO (Johns & Davies, 1983), and TASP (Clandfield, 2005) can be used together as a text manipulation framework with excerpts from Austen’s Pride and Prejudice (1813), Martel’s Life of Pi (2001) and Ishiguro’s The Remains of the Day (1989) to stimulate ESL/EFL learning. These texts come from novels which many consider literary masterpieces and which have been adapted as movies. The paper addresses the following key research questions:

1) What reading skills and sub-skills can the selected literary texts help develop among ESL/EFL students?
2) What aspects of grammar and vocabulary can students highlight and practise in the texts?
3) How can the texts be used as representations of (alternative) social reality to generate discussion of critical issues among students?

2.0 TAVI, TALO, and TASP Orientations to Literary Text
2.1 A Schematic View of the TAVI/TALO/TASP Approach
The terms “TAVI” and “TALO” were coined by Johns & Davies (1983) in their outline of an approach to the teaching of reading in EFL, particularly in ESP and in the learner’s L1. The term “TASP” was added later by Clandfield (2005) to what has come to be approached as a framework for working with a wide variety of texts, including those from literature (Thekes, 2010). Johns and Davies (1983), in outlining the TAVI-TALO as “a framework for classroom interaction in which the students work in small groups to puzzle out the meaning of text” (p. 1), assert that “only at the end of the [TAVI] activities should the teacher do what is done first with the TALO method, which is to explain whatever residue remains of difficult words and expressions…” (p. 11). Clandfield adds “TASP: Text as a springboard for production… [or] Text as a Stimulus for Production” to
the Johns and Davies’ (1983) TAVI-TALO framework: “this means using a text as a springboard for another task - usually a reading or writing task” (Clandfield, 2005).

Figure 2.1 shows an overview of the present proposed English Language Teaching (ELT) orientation to literary texts in the ESL/EFL classroom in terms of pedagogic tasks, exercises, and related activities that are expected to promote effective reading skills and language acquisition. Further details about these activities and their use are found in Section 3.0. The schematic also includes the key research questions of the paper under the column titled “ELT Orientation to Literary Text”. A summary of responses to these questions that may be gleaned from the present teaching-learning framework is attempted in the final remarks section of this paper.

2.2 Synopses of the Selected Novels

2.2.1 Pride and Prejudice (1813) by Jane Austen
The novel is a story of love and related ramifications among the English upper class of the Georgian era. The narrative revolves around the Bennet family and its five daughters, and particularly the conflict between Elizabeth Bennet’s pride of self and prejudice against upper class snobbishness, and the aristocrat Darcy’s pride of status/affluence and prejudice against Elizabeth’s (lack of) class. The two protagonists finally sort out their differences and unite in love (Pride and Prejudice-Encyclopaedia Britannica).

2.2.2 Life of Pi (2001) by Yann Martel
Martel’s epic recounts the story of the young Pi who is stranded at sea on a solitary life boat with a 450-pound Bengal Tiger after the cargo ship carrying various other animals sinks. As both Pi and the tiger ultimately survive the ordeal at sea, and each other, to go their separate ways, the novel transcends its immediate context of surreal survival against all odds to other almost unreal probabilities.

2.2.3 Remains of the Day (1989) by Kazuo Ishiguro
The 2017 Nobel Prize for Literature winner Ishiguro’s novel narrates the story of a butler named Stevens who spends his whole life in striving to elevate his job to the highest degree of professionalism. To this end, he sacrifices many aspects of his personal life, as well as his relationship with his father and the woman he loves quietly. His success as a butler, however, appears to be a Pyrrhic victory as people question his dedication to Lord Darlington. Nevertheless, he remains true to his calling in life by rededicating his services to the American Mr. Faraday, the new owner of Darlington Hall.

2.3 Some Methodological Considerations
All three orientations and related teaching-learning activities involve a single text extract from each novel in the conference paper presentation. Therefore, there are three texts from the three novels, respectively. Each literary text extract and EFL/ESL teaching-learning tasks, exercises, and activities are planned to be completed within a single one-hour lesson, and are sequenced as follows (see Appendix A, Table 1: Schematic of Teaching-Learning Orientations to Literary Text): A. Pre-Reading Activity; B. TAVI Tasks, C. TALO Tasks, and D. TASP Tasks. It is also noteworthy that the present methodological framework is based on a traditional grammar analysis.
of the text extracts in questions for further work, particularly in TALO e.g. identifying elements of syntax in a text before further exploring its meaning potential (Aryusmar, 2010, p. 73).

Pre-reading activities are followed by TAVI-type tasks and exercises in order to ensure primacy of focus on meaning before form. In other words, TALO-type text-based work comprising mainly grammar and vocabulary follows after students have had the opportunity to grasp the meaning of the situations and sociocultural context depicted in the text. General educational principles of teaching-learning processes that guide the presentation, practice, and production sequence of activities may be circumvented to make for meaningful learning in context.

Some essential principles or maxims that apply in the present context of using literary texts to engender reading skills and language acquisition in ESL/EFL may include the following presented as crisp imperatives for the language teacher: a) Ensure learner readiness, b) Use learners’ previous knowledge, c) Promote meaningful learning, d) Proceed from simple to complex, e) Proceed from general to specific, f) Proceed from known to unknown, g) Proceed from whole to part, and h) Proceed from particular to general. These maxims serve as “a set of principles in terms of which the content, forms, and methods of teaching and learning are viewed” (see e.g. Principles of Education and Teaching-learning Process; Principles of Teaching, 1980)

3.0 TAVI-, TALO- and TASP-based ESL Tasks, and Activities
Each text extract from the selected novels is followed by a series of reading, and related teaching-learning activities per TAVI, TALO, and TASP text orientation.

I. Extract from Pride and Prejudice (pp. 194-195)
If Elizabeth, when Mr. Darcy gave her the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of his offers, she had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may be well supposed how eagerly she went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited. Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did she first understand that he believed any apology to be in his power; and steadfastly was she persuaded that he could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against everything he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes. His belief of her sister's insensibility, she instantly resolved to be false, and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

But when this subject was succeed by his account of Mr. Wickham, when she read with somewhat clearer attention, a relation of events, which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of his worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to his own history of himself, her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!"—and when
she had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that she would never look at it again.

A. Pre-reading Activity
Talk about different ways of making a judgement about a person. Which is the best way to do it?

B. TAVI Text Orientation
Activity 1 (Cloze passage). Complete the following extract from Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) (pp. 89-90). First read through the whole passage to get a general understanding of the text. Then fill in each blank space with a suitable word from the box below the text to complete each sentence.

If Elizabeth, when Mr. Darcy gave her the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of his offers, she had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it be well supposed how eagerly she through them, and what a contrariety emotion they excited. Her feelings as read were scarcely to be defined. amazement did she first understand that believed any apology to be in power; and steadfastly was she persuaded he could have no explanation to, which a just sense of shame not conceal.

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His belief of her sister's insensibility, instantly resolved to be false, and account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

Activity 2: Comprehension Questions
1) What kinds of emotions did Elizabeth experience as she went through the content of the letter?
2) What was the part of the letter that she simply refused to accept?
3) Can you guess why this letter was written?
4) Predict how Elizabeth would react when she meets Darcy for the first time after having read the letter?
C. TALO Text Orientation

a) Match words from the extract with the given meanings.

1. Eagerly
2. Renewal
3. Contrariety
4. Steadfastly
5. Prejudice
6. Resolved
7. Penitent
8. Insolence
9. Alarming
10. Oppressed

A) To start again
B) Doing the opposite
C) Resolutely
D) Rudeness
E) Showing discrimination
F) Treated cruelly
G) With keenness
H) Ashamed
I) Settled
J) Shocking

b) Write down ten nouns from the text.

D. TASP Text Orientation

1) Do you think pride is a positive virtue? Do you know a person from your family and friends who shows a lot of pride in his/her dealings? Do people like his/her behaviour?

2) Can you think of some other novels by Jane Austen in which she talks about making wrong judgements about a person? What lessons can be drawn by the readers in the context of making the right judgement?

3) How can you enact certain portions of "Pride and Prejudice" so that different emotions of characters are placed in the context of the existing social realities of modern times?

II. Extract from Life of Pi (pp. 81-82)

He was a Sufi, a Muslim mystic. He sought fana, union with God, and his relationship with God was personal and loving. "If you take two steps towards God," he used to tell me, "God runs to you!"

He was a very plain-fashioned man, with nothing in his looks or in his dress that made memory cry hark. I'm not surprised I didn't see him the first time we met. Even when I knew him very well, encounter after encounter, I had difficulty recognizing him. His name was Satish Kumar. These are common names in Tamil Nadu, so the coincidence is not so remarkable. Still, it pleased me that this pious baker, as plain as a shadow and of solid health, and the Communist biology teacher and science devotee, the walking mountain on stilts, sadly afflicted with polio in his childhood, carried the same name. Mr. and Mr. Kumar taught me biology and Islam. Mr. and Mr. Kumar led me to study zoology and religious studies at the University of Toronto. Mr. and Mr. Kumar were the prophets of my Indian youth.

We prayed together and we practised dhikr, the recitation of the ninety-nine revealed names of God. He was a hafiz, one who knows the Qur'an by heart, and he sang it in a slow, simple chant. My Arabic was never very good, but I loved its sound. The guttural eruptions and long flowing vowels rolled just beneath my comprehension like a beautiful brook. I gazed into this brook for long spells of time. It was not wide, just one man's voice, but it was as deep as the universe.
Text-based EFL/ESL Teaching-Learning Activities

A. Pre-reading Activity: Students discuss different ways of handling crises in their lives. What in their opinion is the best way of overcoming them?

B. TAVI Text Orientation
Comprehension check: Discuss the following questions/activities.

1. Think of a suitable title for the content of this extract.
2. Why do you think the word “mister” is repeated so many times?
3. Students in groups take one sentence each from the text and put them on their chests. Then they interact with each other and put them back in order.
4. Why did the writer probably enjoy the recitation of the Holy Quran, although he did not understand Arabic?

C. TALO Text Orientation
a) Try to guess the meaning of the following words in context:
   1) sought
   2) plain-featured
   3) encountered
   4) coincidence
   5) remarkable
   6) afflicted
   7) revealed
   8) chant
   9) eruption
   10) brook

b) Write down 10 action verbs from the extract.

c) Rational cloze: Using “parts of speech” (grammar) and content words in context.
He had ordinary features. His __________ (appear) as well as dress were quite unattractive. It was hard to __________ (recognize) him even after several meetings. He had a _______ (familiar) Tamil Nadu name. It must also be admitted that this baker ________ (be) very religious. On top of that, he was simple and healthy too. What’s more, he ________ (teach) biology and was ______________ (devote) to science. He used to __________ (walk) on stilts that made him look quite tall. Sadly, he __________ (contract) polio when he was a child. I __________ (learn) so many things from him. He gave me information about biology, Islam, zoology and religious studies. They were a great10) ____________ (influence) on the days of my youth. We prayed together and also ____________ (recite) the names of God.

D. TASP Text Orientation
1) Discuss different ways that can help you get closer to God?
2) Do you remember God only when you are in a crisis?
3) Can you think of any other text by Yann Martel or any other author where he/she mentions a similar religious encounter?
III. Extract from *The Remains of the Day* (pp. 243-244)

“Lord Darlington wasn’t a bad man. He wasn’t a bad man at all and at least he had the privilege of being able to say at the end of his life that he made his own mistakes. His lordship was a courageous man, he chose a certain path, in life it proved to be a misguided one, but there he chose it, he can say at least. As for myself, I cannot even claim that. You see I trusted, I trusted in his lordship’s wisdom. All those years, I served him, I trusted I was doing something worthwhile I can’t even say I made my own mistakes. Really – one has to ask oneself, what dignity is there in that?”

“Now look mate, I’m not sure I follow everything you’re saying. But if you ask me, your attitude’s all wrong, see? Don’t keep looking back all the time, you’re bound to get depressed. And all right, you can’t do your job as well as you used to. But it’s the same for all of us, see? We’ve all got to put our feet up at some point. Look at me. Been happy as a lark since the day I retired. All right, so neither of us are exactly in our first flush of youth, but you’ve got to keep looking forward. And I believe it was then he said: you’ve got to enjoy yourself. The evening’s the best part of the day. You’ve done your day’s work. Now, you can put your feet up and enjoy it. That’s how, I look at it. Ask anybody, they’ll all tell you. The evening’s the best part of day.”

“I’m sure you are quite correct”, I said, “I’m so sorry, this is so unseemly, I suspect I’m over tired, I’ve been travelling rather a lot, you see.”

It is now some twenty minutes since the man left, but I have remained here in this bench to await the event that has just taken place—namely the switching on of the pier lights. As I say, the happiness with which the pleasure seekers gathering on this pier greeted this small event would tend to vouch for the correctness of my companion’s words; for a great many people the evening is the most enjoyable part of the day. Perhaps, then, there is something to his advice that I should cease looking back. So much that I should adopt a more positive outlook and try to make the best of what remains of my day. After all, what can we ever gain in forever looking back, and blaming ourselves if our lives have not turned out quite as we might have wished? The hard reality is surely that for the likes of you and I there is little choice other than to leave our fate, ultimately in the hands of those great gentlemen at the hub of this world who employ our services. What is the point in worrying oneself about what one could or could not have done to control the course one’s life took? Surely, it is enough that the likes of you and I at least try to make our small contribution count for something, true and worthy. And if some of us are prepared to sacrifice much in life in order to pursue such aspirations surely that is in itself whatever the outcome, cause for pride and contentment.

Text-based EFL/ESL Teaching-Learning Activities

A. Pre-reading Activity: Students discuss some anecdotes from their life in which they made some sacrifices to do some duty.

B. TAVI Text Orientation

1) Summarize the passage.
2) Give a suitable title to this passage.
3) Predict How Stevens will react after this kind of reflection.
C. TALO Text Orientation
1) Choose the most suitable form of the verb in brackets to complete the missing information.

Lord Darlington was a good person as he ______________ (accept) his mistakes at the end. He was also a brave man who _________ (choose) his own path in life. Although it did not __________ (yield) the intended results but at least he remained committed to a goal. I cannot say the same for myself. I _________ (have) faith in the wisdom of Lord Darlington and I believed that by __________ (serve) him I was doing a noble job. The important questions that one ___________ (need) to ask at the end is whether we have done our tasks with honour.

2) Identify 10 adjectives from the extract given above.

D. TASP Text Orientation
1) Do you agree that evening is the best part of life? Talk about both the literal and symbolic meanings.
2) Give an example from another novel of Ishiguro that you have read that involves the main character in a similar state of reflection?
3) How would you dramatize this excerpt in the class? (Students exchange dialogues with each other with the same intensity of emotions.)
4) Do you think Ishiguro deserved to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2017? Give reasons for your answers.

4.0 Conclusion
This paper presents an approach to using literary texts in the ESL/EFL classroom to help learners develop their reading, other basic language skills, as well as their creative and critical thinking skills in the language. In relation to the key research questions that were posed in the introduction to the paper, a summary of responses, albeit by no means exhaustive, is presented below:

1) ESL/EFL reading skills and sub-skills that the literary texts help develop:
   • Comprehending overall text meaning
   • Locating key character information
   • Predicting content before/after situation depicted
   • Suggesting implied meanings in a text
   • Skimming for main ideas
   • Scanning for specific bits of information
   • Producing a gist of textual extract
   • Making inferences in context
   • Analysing the plot and locating specific scenes from extract

2) Aspects of grammar and vocabulary highlighted in the literary texts:
   • Matching words with meanings
   • Identifying parts of speech in a given text
   • Locating clauses as examples of basic word patterns. E.g. S-V-O; S-LV-SC, etc.
A rose by any other name… Exploiting any literary

Ahmad, Abdullah & Ibrahim

- Parts of extract presented as rational cloze texts to teach grammar and vocabulary
- Scanning text to locate content words, and function words
- Rational cloze (correct tense forms)

3) ESL/EFL use activities to generate creative/critical discussion of representations of social reality in the literary texts
- Discussion about key character attributes
- Dramatization/improvisation of text situation
- Students source extracts of texts from author’s other novels/works
- Students co-construct a written dialogue for dramatization and/or improvisation
- Student references to other texts where main characters show similar behaviour traits
- Critical views and comments about Kazuo Ishiguro’s winning of Nobel Prize in Literature and/or other authors in the present text selection
- Oral accounts by students to relate similar life experiences and comments by other students

The benefits of using literary texts to teach reading, and other higher order language skills in tandem with grammar and vocabulary in ESL/EFL cannot be over stressed. As representations of social reality from diverse cultures, a variety of literary texts afford ESL/EFL learners the opportunity to use language in the classroom and beyond in ways that are meaningful to their own lived realities. The novels sampled in this paper have been produced as films that the learners could also watch in whole or part to further heighten their critical appreciation.

Empirical research with the actual use of these texts with/without related movie clips may be expected to validate the TAVI-TALO-TASP framework presented here, perhaps using Halliday’s transitivity analysis (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013) for TALO work in particular (see e.g. Simpson, 2003). The paper concludes that despite the historic (Savvidou, 2004), but rather arbitrary, separation between literature and language study, the informed use of any literary text harnesses the literature-language nexus to provide the synergy needed for ESL/EFL student learning:

What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;… (Romeo and Juliet Act II, Scene II)

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Faiz Sathi Abdullah, PhD, is Associate Professor (applied linguistics) in the Department of English Language and Literature at Al Zahra College for Women where he teaches various undergraduate courses. His areas of research interest are discourse studies, English for Academic
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References


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**APPENDIX A**

**Table 1: Schematic of Teaching-Learning Orientations to Literary Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELT Orientation to Literary Text</th>
<th>Pedagogic Tasks/Exercises</th>
<th>Summary of task/exercise types in accordance with orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Extract 1</strong></td>
<td><em>Pride and Prejudice</em> (1813)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Extract 2</strong></td>
<td><em>Life of Pi</em> (2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Pre-Reading Activity</td>
<td>Set induction/Lesson preparation questions; e.g. Initiate speaking discussion about the different ways of judging a person?</td>
<td>Set induction/Lesson preparation questions; e.g. brief class discussion about surviving particularly difficult life experiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>B. TAVI (Text as Vehicle of Information) Research Question (1)</td>
<td>1. Fixed-deletion cloze text (every 7th word) to assess students’ overall comprehension of text.  2. Questions and answers to target specific information.  3. Students predict content before and after that presented in text.</td>
<td>1. Comprehension questions to assess students’ ability to predict content, and suggest implied meanings.  2. Students skim the passage and produce a gist.  3. Making inferences in context  4. Unscrambling the text: students in small groups select a sentence/text segment each and reorder the sentences/parts as per the text.  5. Scanning the text for specific information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. TALO: (Text as Linguistic Object) Research Question (2)</td>
<td>1. Matching words with meanings.  2. Identifying parts of speech from a given text.  3. Locating clauses as examples of basic word patterns. E.g. S-V-O; S-LV-SC, etc.</td>
<td>1. Parts of extract presented as rational cloze texts to teach grammar and vocabulary.</td>
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### D. TASP (Text as Springboard to Production)

**Research Question (3)**

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Discussion about pride as a character attribute, the ability to judge a person correctly and relating them to experiences in real life situations.</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Dramatization/improvisation of text situation as representation of contemporary social reality.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Students bring extracts of texts from Austen’s other novels for comparative analyses.</td>
<td>3.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Speaking discussion related to references to other texts by the same author in which the character shows the same behaviour traits,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Inviting students to express views about Kazuo Ishiguro’s winning of Nobel Prize in Literature (2017).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Students bring extracts of texts from Ishiguro’s other novels for critical appreciation/comments in class (handouts of texts and key questions distributed).</td>
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Towards Arab Students’ Grammatical Errors in Academic Writing & their Perceptions

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Abstract
Writing plays an integral role in English students’ academic life. Background study reveals that ‘grammar’ is one of the most significant challenges concerning students’ academic writing performance. The present paper aims to find out the grammatical difficulties that university students face in their academic writing and to identify the causes of this problem. Furthermore, the study seeks to investigate the strategies and solutions to tackle this problem. Data in this research were collected from 200 students of B.A. in Education (with the sub-major in English) at the University of Nizwa in Oman. The samples were students’ assignments throughout the semester. A table of frequency was formed to list the type of grammatical errors and the number of times the mistake was observed. Three grammatical points, namely, tenses, adverbs and pronouns were students’ most frequent mistakes. Then an interview was conducted with the students to figure out their perception of the mistakes in their academic writing skill. Students’ perception was looked into against their actual mistakes in writing. Finally, the sources of these errors were investigated in the background study and the related literature, and some pedagogical implications were made. The method of research in this study is qualitative.

Key Words: academic writing, error, grammar, perception, tenses

DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/MEC1.10
1. Introduction
Grammar is an essential aspect of any good piece of writing. Many students who are studying English as a second language face difficulties in their writing because of several factors throughout their learning. Many studies agree that grammar is one of the most significant parts which is considered the main obstacle ESL students face in their writing because of the difference between their mother tongue and second language systems.

2. Problem statement
Grammar difficulties in academic writing among students at Nizwa University, is one of the urgent problems of our time. University students have to know that writing skill is important for academic and social fields. It has been observed that some students are facing many difficulties in grammar and it affects their performance and scores.

3. Literature Review
Many researchers have thoroughly conducted and investigated grammar difficulties in academic writing that a great number of ESL students face. These difficulties show their impact on students’ performance in writing skills. Davidson (2005) states that there are difficulties that SL student face in their writing because of many reasons during their learning process. According to English language, it has a lot of irregularities and idiosyncrasies which create several difficulties in academic writing that Second Language students face. Moreover, Farooq (2012) claims that ESL students face difficulties in grammar which is considered as the most difficult field in writing. There are many problems that students face when they write sentences, structures, and paragraphs correctly. Grammar skills consist of a set of sentences, the use of various types of sentences, subject verb agreement, parallel structure, placement of modifiers and tense agreement. Al Fadda (2012) finds that ESL students encounter many difficulties to distinguish between spoken and written words, and they face grammatical problems in using subject-verb agreement and how to combine sentences to write a paragraph correctly. Besides that, he suggests that another challenge could be faced which is creating ideas to write their topics, so that will be an obstacle to succeed in their writing. Moreover, Amin and Alamin (2012) assert that reading and then writing by using their own words can guide students to commit grammatical errors, so they will tend to copy others’ work to avoid their mistakes. Some researchers believe that the main reason for the mistakes is the transformation of the forms and meanings of the sentences from students’ first languages into English language. That’s what the researcher Abisamra (2007) claims in his study; he believes that Arab students, who learn EFL, make many inter-lingual mistakes because of depending on their first language all time. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2012) agree that SL students are influenced by their first language rules that guide them to make errors in their academic writing. According to this, many studies agree that first language is the main factor that affects students’ performance in writing. Many studies recommend that teachers should keep in mind many useful ways and strategies to improve students’ writing. Consequently, it is important when teachers help students to succeed in their writing skill by working as one team and that will make a difference in students’ performance later. Chin (2000) adds that during editing and revising students’ writing, teachers have to provide grammar instruction which lead them to recognize their mistakes, correct wrong sentences and write in appropriate structure. So when the teacher notices many students making mistakes and misusing the rules in sentences, they can provide more lessons to give their corrective feedback to students, advising students to write more than one draft to reduce their mistakes in grammar.
4. Methodology
This qualitative study investigates the grammatical errors in academic writing that the students of Nizwa University depicted. 90 students were observed in writing-themed courses to explore their common mistakes in English grammar. Then the students were interviewed in order to look into their perception of the difficulties they generally face regarding English Grammar.

1. Students' writing samples:
The type of the writing activity students performed was ‘argumentative’. This type of writing was specifically implemented, given that it is a common type in academic writing and international examinations e.g. IELTS or TOEFL.

2. An interview:
An interview was conducted in this paper to investigate students’ perception that was looked into against their actual mistakes in writing. Moreover, this method seems to be a suitable method for collecting data because it provides an explanation for the answers of interviewees which lead to the answers of the research questions. This research aims to find the common grammatical difficulties and the reasons of this problem. Some research objectives were achieved by collecting the data through students' writing samples, but the other objectives need to apply the open-ended questions to know students' perception of the mistakes in their academic writing skill. Furthermore, "In interviews, there is interactivity, which not only enables the researcher to explain any confusing issues to the interviewees but most importantly, it allows for a deeper insight to be obtained by using a probing technique, that is asking follow-up questions to provide a more complete and comprehensive explanation of the studied phenomenon." (Berg & Lune, 2014, pp. 116-128).

5. Procedures:
The writing samples were taken from 90 students who are studying Advanced English or Grammar-2 which show their grammatical mistakes they had made. These samples will identify three common grammatical mistakes that students had made in their writing. The interview was conducted to the students and it will identify students’ perception about the common difficulties and the reasons for facing these difficulties. It included four questions.

6. Results
Students’ samples:
According to samples of students’ assignments, the results can be seen by a table of frequency below that shows a list of grammatical errors and the number of times the mistake was observed.

Table 1. Frequency of Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The grammatical errors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tenses</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbs</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pronouns</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject/ verb agreement</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misplaced apostrophes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive voice</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuation</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Towards Arab Students’ Grammatical Errors in Academic**

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**a. Tenses:**
Tenses are considered as one of essential elements to make a sentence; many of SLA students face difficulties to use them in their writing. This is due to Arabic structure where a sentence can be without a verb, unlike English sentences. For example, SLA students have problems in understanding the perfect tense since it has no equivalent verb in Arabic, and it is usually confused with the simple past. This tense describes a past event that is related in some way to the present. Students find that the rules in grammar are not always understandable, and it is difficult to analyze the difference between past tense and the present perfect. According to the table of frequency above, making mistakes in using tenses was observed 5 times.

**b. Adverbs:**
Using adverbs is another common problem that Nizwa University students face in their writing. The problem is that students cannot recognize adverb placement, because adverbs of frequency come after the verb ‘be’ or with other verbs and they usually come before the main verb. For example: She’s always studying, or: *He always clean his room*. Furthermore, Students misunderstand the adverb function, thus lead them to misuse it in writing meaningful sentences. They face problem to use adverbs that describe verbs and adjectives. According to the table of frequency above, making mistakes in using adverbs was observed 3 times.

**c. Pronouns:**
The third common error that Nizwa University students make frequently is how to use singular and plural pronouns in sentences. For example: “Someone lost his bag”. Some students may misuse the possessive pronoun “his” and replace it by “their”. Some students misuse the word “its” which is the possessive pronoun for the pronoun “it”, and they get confused with the word “it’s” which shows means “it is”. According to the table of frequency above, making mistakes in using pronouns was observed 6 times.

**Results of students’ interview:**
An interview was conducted with the students to figure out their perception of the mistakes in their academic writing skill. Students’ perception was looked into against their actual mistakes in writing. The results were as follows:

1. **How often do you write in English?**
The majority of students said that they usually write from 2 to 5 days during their classroom. Some of them said that they write in English 4 times per month. That means the students write in English in their classrooms and for doing their assignments.

2. **What is your main grammar mistake?**
Most of students have the same answer that they make a grammatical mistake in tenses; they make common mistakes in using present perfect, past simple and present progressive.

3. **What do you find difficult in grammar?**
All of students find difficult in usage of tenses, they said that they get confused to choose the suitable tenses to describe the actions and write correct sentences.

4. **What are the reasons?**
Some students believe that the lack of practice and knowledge are the main reasons. While, others said that the difference between Arabic language and English language could be another
reason of grammatical difficulties. Other students claim the method of teaching grammar could be another reason.

7. Discussion
The qualitative method of this research aimed to investigate more details about the grammatical difficulties that the students’ of Nizwa University face in their writing. Thus, these results showed that tenses was the most frequent grammatical error, that is what Al-Buainain (2007) confirmed in her study which was mentioned in this research. Adverbs and pronouns were other frequent errors that students made in their assignments throughout the semester. Using an interview was a great decision to know more about students’ perception in grammar difficulties. It showed that students had difficulties in using tenses and they said that the reasons related to their first language and the lack of practice in writing as Darus and Subramaniam (2009) claimed.

Furthermore, students should practice their writing skill and keep in their mind that grammar is the main part to make correct sentence and deliver their ideas. Also, they should be encouraged and motivated by their teachers to help them decrease their errors.

8. Recommendations
1. Students should enrich their knowledge in English and differentiate between their first language's rules and the English language they learn.
2. Students should be encouraged to read widely whether in classroom or at home, because reading is considered as the main source of knowledge.
3. Students should practice in writing, try to correct their grammatical mistakes by themselves first, and find the way to reduce committing errors.
4. Students should avoid transformation of the forms and meanings of the sentences from their first languages into English language.
5. Students should avoid copying others' work in order to avoid making mistakes.
6. Students should not be afraid of making grammatical errors, but they should learn from their errors and know how to prevent making them again.
7. Teachers should aim to improve students' confidence in their writing by their teaching strategies, giving them correction feedback and making students aware that making grammatical errors and mistakes should not discourage them from writing.
8. Teachers should write frequent errors down and give them special attention, with a period set aside for the feedback and correction of such errors.
9. Teachers should provide appropriate academic writing courses and teaching strategies which have significant impact on students' performance.

9. Conclusion
This research investigates grammatical difficulties in academic writing and it discusses the reasons of this problem that the researchers and students claimed. The researchers found that the main reason is students' first language which has a strong impact on English language. The researchers confirm that the students should deal with grammar as an essential part in writing, enhancing their knowledge in English. Furthermore, they should distinguish between the first and second language rule to be aware how to deal with both languages to avoid making more errors later.
Moreover, this research provides some solutions to reduce the negative impact of grammatical errors on students' performance. The teacher has a great role to improve the writing skill for his/her students.
by finding such strategies which suit students' levels to learn grammar and use the rules in correct way.

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Enhancing English Language Teaching through Films in General Foundation Programs

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Abstract:
Enhancing English Language Teaching (ELT) through films in General Foundation Programs (GFPs), Oman is a practical research paper which aims at exploiting of technologies in ELT in order to develop linguistic competence and learner autonomy of students in the GFP. Research in communicative approach to language has shown that competence in oral and written language grows as the learners actively use the language in and out of the classroom. The aim of this paper is to engage learners in activities that demand their autonomous participation and develop linguistic competence and learner autonomy. The vital question every teacher has to ponder upon is “Can we expect what was taught in the previous class is retained in the next class?” The present study focuses on how films can aid in enhancing ELT in the GFP in Oman. The research data collected will be empirical and qualitative in nature. GFP students will be the main subjects of this research. The research will be carried out on different levels and groups in the GFP. The activities based on films expose the learners to authentic language input, help them learn how language operates and challenge them to use the language independently. The rich visual imagery, the action and motions of the films deliver the learners with multi-sensory involvement (Arcario, 1993). Infusing technology into Education serves a variety of purposes in language teaching. The observation of cultural aspects such as traditions helps to understand the function of the language. By this pragmatic approach an innovative teacher can aid students’ critical thinking skills as well as their linguistic competence. Hence it is suggested that a judicious selection of digital materials along with several learner-friendly tasks can be incorporated in syllabus of ELT.

Key Words: ELT, GFP, films, learner autonomy, linguistic competence

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1. Introduction

In this technology dominating days, English Language Teaching (ELT) to the foreign language learners who are studying in their General Foundation Programs (GFPs) in Oman is not only challenging, but also there is a need to come out of conventional teaching strategies and adapt different strategies which aid the students to develop their linguistic competence and learner autonomy. Thus the learning outcomes should be taken into account while using these strategies. By using films as one of the teaching strategies, one can enhance the English language teaching to the Second / Foreign language learners in the GFP in Oman. Moreover, diversity and flexibility can be encouraged by using films as a teaching strategy in the classroom which in turn can create a comfortable learning atmosphere for the students.

There are many studies which echo the benefits of using films as an adept strategy in ELT to the foreign language learners. To mention a few, Films enhance learning of a language through providing adequate input which is necessary for spoken language learning (Bahrani & Tam, 2012). Champoux (1999) says using films can be a good teaching resource. Mishan (2004) and Gilmore (2007) say that films can bring authenticity to the classroom. Reid (1987) says that films provide a room for different learning styles in the classroom. Using films in ELT in GFP has numerous advantages compared to conventional teaching styles (Wilson 2017). Films offer learners with genuine input so they can be viewed as authentic material (Mishan, 2004, p. 216). Draper (2012) says that visualization is an important prerequisite to be a good reader. By watching films one can easily acquire language sub-consciously (Krashen 1985: p.4). Films inspire the learners to learn English and the visuality helps the slow learners improve their comprehension skills. Films are an ideal way to engage students in doing array of tasks in a second language learning classroom (Goldstein & Driver, 2014). By reviewing the literature one can easily say that using films in English language teaching is an adept method and has numerous benefits compared to conventional teaching styles.

1.2 Background Information of GFP

GFP is introduced by the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman, is a study program undertaken by the students before they get admitted into higher educational courses. Students who have completed their Secondary school in Oman have to join the GFP in order to enrich their knowledge, skills and competences they need to undertake a higher education program. All the higher education institutes in Oman are required to offer a GFP before the commencement of their Associate / Diploma or Bachelors degree studies. This program includes four areas of courses such as English Language, Math, Computing and Study skills.

Students arrive into the higher education institutions with diverse educational backgrounds. As English is their foreign language most of the students who steps into General Foundation Program encounter multitude problems while learning English language. Some have poor comprehension skills, minimum vocabulary, very slow reading, difficult to express themselves, poor writing skills so on and so forth.

2. Aim

The aim of this paper is twofold; to engage learners in activities that demands their autonomous participation, and to develop linguistic competence and learner autonomy. The vital question every
teacher has to ponder upon is “Can we expect what was taught in the previous class is retained in the next class?” The present study focuses on how films can aid in enhancing ELT in the GFP in Oman.

3. Teaching Various Skills

Films aid in teaching various skills while using in a foreign language teaching class room. Teacher can exploit in teaching verbal skills, Writing, Vocabulary, Grammar and cultures as these are different skills of a language which are not interrelated, the teacher must use different teaching techniques / methods while teaching these areas.

3.1 Verbal Skills:

According to Katchen (2003), those learners who can communicate well in their mother tongues will also be the decent speakers when they learn L2. Though the verbal skills cannot be automatically acquired but by constant training the student will learn it.

Nation and Newton (2009) point that even though the learner might not be familiar with the topic, but efficient conversation techniques help the students to continue the conversation. One of the useful conversational technique is Q —> SA + EI, which means a question – information or YES/No is often followed by a short answer and some extra information related to the answer. In addition to this, a supportive partner can be of great help in practicing verbal skills. The supportive partner can supply some vocabulary related to the topic, help in filling the gaps during conversation, may correct the verb tenses, and help in asking needful questions. Next, repetition of conversation can aid in verbal skills. As verbal skills require multiword phrases compared to written language, its good to memorise small phrases which can aid in improving verbal skills.

There are two kinds of conversations which we engage in our daily life – Formal and Informal. The formal conversation happens in a setting where a question is asked and you reply to that question providing the necessary information related to it. In this type, there is a less chance to prolong the conversation as the information is directly related to the question. In the latter one, as it is related to the social settings so there is a scope to extend the talk and also to switch on to different topics.

By using films as part of language teaching one can impart both the formal conversation as well as informal conversation in enhancing speaking skills. Even the slow learners can be encouraged and engaged in such activities.

3.2 Writing

As we all know that the writing skill is one of the productive skills which requires conscious effort of the learner, so by using films this can be achieved smoothly. Writing can be made more versatile and fun by choosing various tasks and activities from films. Katchen (2003) says that as writing is considered as a productive skill so the engrossment of brain is emphasized in this process. He also says that films can bring array of writing tasks into the classroom.

In order to exploit films to teach writing, the teacher can ask the students to write about the review of the film after watching it, comparison between the films of the same director or writing
contrast between the films, writing summary or gist. Students can do pre-writing about a film after they come to know about the title of the film. In pre-writing, students are free to choose different styles of writing: free writing, information questioning and gathering, interviewing, sketching etc.

3.3 Vocabulary

Vocabulary plays a vital role in communicating well in a foreign language. Teaching or learning vocabulary requires a great amount of dedication and hard work. Learning vocabulary in a foreign language is not as easy as learning words in Language 1. Lot of practice and repetition goes into it. According to Rosenweig, (1979) there are two uses of vocabulary exists in any language: Active use of vocabulary and Passive use of vocabulary. In active use of vocabulary, one can recall the vocabulary and produce it. In passive use of vocabulary one can recognize it and comprehend. However, both active and passive uses of vocabulary are very important in learning a foreign language.

According to Yuksel and Tanriverdi (2009) using of subtitles or captions while watching a film aids a lot in attaining vocabulary, subsequently, they aid the learner integrate a word into a situation. In addition, instance vocabulary can be learned by watching films which revolves around a certain theme. With enough practice and repetition even a slow learner can acquire good amount of vocabulary. While watching the film teacher can point out at certain vocabulary related to the social context in the film. By doing so the learner can be in a position to use the vocabulary in their social life. However, the learners may not acquire 100% of this vocabulary correctly, but it will be good enough for them to use when the social situation arises. Finally, word lists and gap fills can also help in learning vocabulary while watching films. In order to teach this, the teacher can pick a specific scene which may be related to a social setting and then prepare a worksheet with some missing vocabulary and ask the students to fill in the missing information while watching the film. Thus films help in teaching vocabulary in a simplest way to the students in General Foundation Programs.

3.4 Grammar

In general there are two approaches to teach grammar. The first one is Deductive approach and the second is Inductive approach. As per Larsen – Freeman (1979), the facilitator in deductive approach gives the rule and asks the students to frame examples. This approach is rather guided and conventional. On the other hand, in inductive way, the teacher illustrates some examples in the class and then asks the students to predict the rule for the given examples. This way of teaching grammar is more apt and novel, which inturn involves students and encourage their active participation. According to Van Abbe (1965), using audiovisual methods makes teaching and learning interesting than just in the conventional style. He points out that students can learn grammatical structures more effectively by watching films rather than attending traditional grammar classes. Finally, grammar based activities from a specific scene can be of good practice for students.

3.5 Cultures

There is a saying that every language has its own culture. In order to learn a new culture one must learn its language. A broader picture of English-speaking countries’ culture can be taught to students by using films. As each film reflects the culture of its own country so it’s important to
teach the students that culture is always embedded in the language. By showing genres like drama and historical, students will have a big picture of the culture variation. Teacher can ask the students to compare their own culture with the culture shown in the film and initiate a debate or ask students to write an essay. By knowing other cultures students become cultural literates. Finally, by introducing various cultures to students through films we can make students tolerant, liberal and sensitive to other cultures and respect them.

Films can trigger culture discussions among the students. Films can be a good source to raise questions and discussions. Various written and verbal assignments can be given to students based on the cultures they have encountered in various movies. Cross-culture communication can also be possible by using films in the classroom.

4. Which Films to Choose?

Stoller (1988) says that preparing the lesson well in advance is considerably significant. Though films bring variety and flexibility to the classroom, one must take enough precautions in choosing the right films to the students in General Foundation Programs in this part of the world. As Oman is a conservative country, not just any film can be shown in the classroom. So the films should be selected and previewed carefully. The teacher must do a lot of homework before showing the film in the class. The teacher should make sure that the students understand the instructional objectives of a film lesson and emphasize that the designed pedagogical goals are accomplished at the end of watching film. Allan (1995) says that the films should be relevant to the students and make them stay motivated.

Stoller (1988) highlights that a film chosen should complement instructional and curricular objectives. The comprehensibility of the film is one of the important factors while choosing a film to show to the GFP students. As the overall comprehension skills of GFP students are above average, so the teacher must take enough care while choosing a film. The students should comprehend the film and accomplish related tasks. The comprehensibility of a film can bring the students together to work on the related tasks. Moreover, it should not be a burden on the teacher to help students understand the language of the film.

Secondly, the films have to facilitate the learner with sufficient pictorial support. The visual images in the film should support the verbal messages so that the students can comprehend what is going on. For students with good comprehension skills less visual images with more verbal messages can do the trick. Then, the delivery of dialogue also plays an important role in choosing the films. In some films, based on their culture the artists use slang which may not be comprehensible for students. Again this is another challenge for the teacher while choosing a film. The accents and the pace of dialogue delivery must be kept in mind while choosing a film. Any extremes may become difficult for students to keep the pace while watching the film. So the teacher should be wise enough to take all these into account and choose the right film to derive the required output from the students. In addition, the teacher should choose the film which complements classroom activities. Pre-viewing, viewing and post-viewing activities better facilitate the learners in comprehension as well as to achieve desired pedagogical goals.

Stoller (1988) points out that before actual viewing of film, students should go through pre-viewing activities. These activities make them ready for the actual viewing. Pre-viewing activities
includes vocab exercises, brainstorming, discussions etc... Pre-viewing helps students to be at pace and comprehend the story and characters involved in it. While viewing activities make the students focus on the film and aid them in understand the twists and turns in the film. Post viewing activities are very important because with those activities the teacher can assess whether the efforts put in showing the film is fruitful or not. Post-viewing activities enhances written and oral skills. Students can be asked to write about the summary or gist of the film or describe their favorite character and also they can be given a chance to add specific details to their favorite character. When it comes to oral skills, students can make presentations about the film or about the climax or about their favorite artist in the film. They can also have debates or discussions. Debates and discussions aids in students improve their public speaking skills. Gathering information exercises can be a good task in all these activities.

Though most of the students in general as well as in General Foundation Programs like action movies, but in my opinion, action movies are not a good source in teaching language because of various reasons. One of the reasons could be they have more action and less room to dialogues, besides violence. Hence some animated films, historical films, educational films, dramas, social issue films and documentaries can be of good source in teaching language while watching.

5. Challenges

Using films bring diversity and veracity to the class, they also bring some challenges to the teacher. Inspite of planning the use of film well in advance, and there will be some or other challenges which we have to encounter while watching. There are two types of challenges we face while using a film based in my experience: Technical and Non-Technical challenges.

5.1 Technical Challenges:

Stoller (1988) points at the poor equipment which can pose challenges while using the film. Though the class rooms are equipped with the state of the art gadgets, but after all they are machines so some or other technical issue arises while using the film. For example, issues with projector, Sound system, Computer accessories and Internet to name a few challenges related to technical aspect.

5.2 Non-technical Challenges

According to Stoller(1988), using films in the class is a time consuming act since the teacher has to view it couple of times before showing to the students. By doing so, the teacher has to keep aside all her other works and has to spare her time in watching and preparing the tasks related to the film. Hence, the teacher has to solely focus on the activities related to film and ignore some other classroom activities. Secondly, the teacher has to do a lot of homework before showing the film. As the students in this part of the world are conservative, every detail of the film must be watched and listened to very judiciously. Unfortunately, if the teacher does not do the homework carefully, then it will be chaotic while watching the film. Next, it’s very important to note the mood of the students while watching the film because certain scenes may distract the students and may demotivate them while watching. Then, the various slangs and accents used in the film can also be one of the challenges while watching. Most of the Scottish films use the local slang so it becomes very difficult for the students at General Foundation Programs in Oman to comprehend and continue watching. So films with neutral accent which can be comprehended by even the
weaker students must be chosen. Choosing an accent depends upon what variety of English language is being used in your country i.e. American English or British English. Most importantly, the level of students can be a big challenge. As we all know that a class comprises of students with various level of comprehension so it’s a big challenge for the teacher to get desired output equally from all the students. In addition, using films to teach Level 1 students is also a big challenge due to the fact that they are very slow learners and it will be complete waste of time to invest such enormous time and preparation. On the other hand, the teacher can introduce films once a while in the class room to get the Level 1 students slowly on the track. There should not be any mode of assessment while this has been introduced to encourage the students. Later stages, when the teacher is confident about the students’ comprehension skills related to English language, can introduce some gap fill exercises or information gathering exercises.

6. Assessment

Assessment is mandatory. Every teacher must assess their students’ comprehension and progress. This can be done formally or informally. Initially informal assessment helps the students feel comfortable. Formal assessment can be introduced during the term end or course end stages. While assessing a student the teacher should take the overall performance of the student into account.

In General Foundation Programs, most of the times it is difficult to make students sit and watch without formal assessment. Formal assessment may include giving assignments, asking the students to make some presentations. Presentations can be made individually or as a group. Informal assessment may include giving handouts to fill the gaps or gathering facts from the movie.

7. The Present Study

The aim is to engage learners in activities that demand their autonomous participation by using films in General Foundation Program and also to develop linguistic competence and learner autonomy.

7.1 Participants

The subjects involved in this study were the students from Level 2 and Level 3 in GFPs. Total 40 subjects were participated in this study. The L1 of all the participants is Arabic. Most of them have completed their secondary school education in the community schools. They are less exposed to English language and its culture outside the class.

7.2 Questionnaire and Data collection and Results

The questionnaire used for this study is being designed by the author. Keeping in mind the comprehension level of the students from General Foundation Program, the questionnaire was drafted in a simple terms. One of the important questions in the questionnaire was whether students like to learn from the digital sources or the conventional resources. Total ten questions were asked in the questionnaire. In order to facilitate the students the author used multiple choice questions. All that students have to do is just to tick their choice of answer. Open ended or closed questions were not used keeping in mind the proficiency level of students. Some background questions related to personal information such as Age, Sex, Hometown, School information, Frequency of Using English, How long familiar with English, Frequency of watching films etc. were asked. The
The purpose behind these background questions was to collect some realistic information of the students. The data was collected after using a few films in the classroom. Data collection was done in the form of survey. A few instructions related to answering the questions were given in the initial stage.

The results indicate that 38 out of 40 students have shown their interest in learning English using films. The rest of them opined that it is a complete waste of time. They also said that watching films is against their culture and their parents do not consent to this activity in the classroom. Secondly, 13 of the students opined that watching films quite often is time consuming as they have to prepare for other subjects as well. As students have to study other subjects like Writing skills, Math and Information Technology, they said that if they spend most of their time on watching films, then they are unable to focus on the rest of their subjects as their mood is completely diverted from the academics to the films. Some of them also said that they are being distracted and disturbed by some of the scenes in the films. On the other hand, the rest opined that watching films encouraged them in learning English language effectively than in traditional style of learning. They mentioned in the comments section that, they feel motivated and inspired to talk in English when they look at some characters in the films. Some also said that they imitate certain characters after watching the films once they are home. This help them to improve the language. Next, 12 students said that the assignments given after the film were bit tough. They said that they are unable to do the assignments because they are given at the end of the film. They opined that it would be more beneficial if the assignments were given at regular intervals while watching the film inorder to complete vocabulary and fill in the gap activities apart from summarizing the film. Then, 23 students mentioned that they could not follow some part of the film because of the swiftness of the dialogue delivery. They mentioned that the pace of dialogue delivery apart from the regular conversations is tough to comprehend. While another majority said that they found some artists’ accent too difficult to comprehend. As most of the films shown are in American accent .When asked about overall learning outcomes that involved in while watching film, 37 students said that they were satisfied with the learning outcomes. Finally, all students have agreed that they have learnt more about other cultures through films than from their text books.

8. Conclusion

Infusing Films into education serves a variety of purposes in language teaching. The observation of cultural aspects such as customs and humor or culturally specific use of the language such as idioms help to understand the function of the language. An innovative and a resourceful teacher can yield meaningful results in not only developing students' linguistic competence but also promoting their higher order critical and reflective thinking skills. Hence it is suggested that a judicious selection of films along with several learner-friendly tasks should be incorporated in the curriculum of language teaching.

Sustained learning can be fostered by making students more aware of language resources available outside the classroom and comfortable, using the authentic materials. Multi-sensory input is likely to assist in more effective memory retention. The observation of cultural aspects such as customs and humor or culturally specific use of the language such as idioms helps to understand the function of the language. Humor in films seems to relax nervous learners and enhance their language learning.
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