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Oman 20th International ELT Virtual Conference

2020

Twenty Years of Oman ELT Conference: Building upon the Past, Envisioning the Future

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Layout and editorial assistance
Dr. Anfal N. Al-Wahaibi
Mrs. Angeline Victor

Cover design
Mohammed Al-Saidi

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Opening Remarks

Dr. Anfal Al-Wahaibi
Chair, Oman ELT International Conference

Thanks to all who joined us today to celebrate our 20th Anniversary of the Oman International English Language Teaching Conference. The last 20 years truly have been transformative for all teachers, lecturers, educational researchers, and technologists. The overall theme of this year's conference is Twenty Years of Oman ELT Conference: ***Building Upon the Past, Envisioning the Future.***

As we move toward the future, it is important to reflect on the past, which created the culture of teaching and learning. In our case, the past was only a few months back! We acknowledged that in the last couple of months, all our lives have changed, near and far, locally, and globally, forever!

Fortunately, the conference this year is intended to approach the changes as well as the challenges we as teachers, administrators, students, and parents faced in a somewhat non-traditional way, beyond the normal emphasis on materials, assessment, and traditional resources. The theme attempts to explore the opportunities that lie outside the classroom.

The conference will feature teaching that can be defined as a process of transmitting knowledge to learners; it involves several kinds of skills that will help students to navigate their way to the future of digital teaching and learning. It is the realization of both learners and teachers that learning is not confined to what the teacher does or the material states, and when resources and opportunities are provided. It relies on the students who are encouraged and supported to take control of their learning, so that it becomes his or her personal task, continuing beyond the time and space of the classroom. It all happened through the valuable content shared and connections made with their outstanding teachers who offer unique benefits and opportunities to their students. The theme of this conference therefore aims to focus on non-traditional means and resources that could be utilized, such as supporting the continuous independent learning by students, and the determined utilization of community connections with organizations and agencies to diversify and enhance existing practices and placing due attention to the cultural context of learning a second language in order to enhance supporting elements and reduce the negative impacts.

It is the role of researchers, experts, and practitioners to develop theories, applications, and practical models to analyze the students' needs, identify the problems they face and overcome the challenges that restrict the proper development of English language skills.

106 presenters - amazing faculty members, academics, administrators, and educators of all sorts of educational experts came together in our 20th ELT Conference to share best practices and network to build a better back to learning and teaching in 2020 and prepare for the hybrid world of learning that is our new normal.

Many thanks to them for responding to our call for papers, in sharing with us their ideas

and experiences to enrich our knowledge and understanding of the theme and for baring with us the many changes and challenges we encountered at the conference over the last couple of months. Indeed, it is presentations that make a conference, and we appreciate their willingness to share their knowledge and professional judgments.

We are also pleased that our annual conference has developed over the years to become a respected professional event in the field of teaching English as a second language.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all my colleagues in the conference organizing committee, its subcommittees, and our amazing volunteer teachers from the CPS faculty for serving as a firm and trustworthy bedrock for the entire conference. It is their dedication, proactive thinking, and resourcefulness that ensured that all deadlines and commitments were met, all contacts were established, and all preparations were brought to a successful completion up to this point.

I hope that this event contributes to your upcoming academic year and, in a wider sense, to the future of digital teaching and learning.

So, on behalf of Oman 20th International ELT virtual Conference, I thank you all for being a part of our remarkable history and I wish you a successful conference.

Welcome Address

The Honourable Dr. Badria Al Shihi
Director, Centre for Preparatory Studies

It is with great delight that I welcome you all to the Oman 20th International English Language Teaching Conference. The theme of this year's conference is a fitting one: 'Building Upon the Past, Envisioning the Future.' The year 2020 has forced educators and students to adapt to exceptional circumstances and experience new educational paradigms. This has been a huge challenge to all of us, but this experience has the potential to be a catalyst for principled, effective and inclusive change in the field of English language teaching. However, as we continue to develop our teaching during these difficult times, we must be mindful of the principles, ideals and achievements of the past. Brian Tracy, a Canadian public speaker and the author of more than 80 books have stated, "Every experience in your life is being orchestrated to teach you something you need to know to move forward." Hence, we cannot ignore the experiences of the past. Revisiting, exploring, and expanding ideas will allow us to see further and navigate to a brighter future.

The experience of the last nine months suggests that e-learning will have a prominent role in English language teaching in the future. We have been forced to embrace its potentials much more rapidly because of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as we have all discovered, e learning is not without its difficulties. Levels of skill and experience in IT vary considerably, and for the majority of students and teachers, adapting to e-learning is an ongoing process that is full of challenges.

Educators are not only interested in learning to use the tools of e-learning, but, more importantly, wish to know how these tools can be best utilised for effective learning. How do we ensure our learners are motivated and engaged? How do we foster effective communication and support language acquisition in an online environment? How do we help learners develop the autonomy to make effective decisions about their own learning? To answer these questions, we must identify sound and effective educational principles and methodological approaches and find ways to remain faithful to these as we embrace the affordances of modern technologies.

Another challenge of great significance is ensuring inclusivity and overcoming digital divides. Students in remote areas may have more limited access to reliable Internet connections making synchronous online lessons less accessible; students from lower-income backgrounds may have more limited access to the devices that enable e-learning, or these devices may be shared between family members, and we must ensure that learners with special educational needs are not excluded from our visions of future learning. At the Centre of Preparatory Studies, we have an expanding community of differently abled students, including blind and visually impaired learners. Carefully designed materials are needed to ensure these students can access the curriculum. Such

students may require training in the use of assistive technologies, and members of staff must be sensitive and adaptability in supporting their learning.

This year has not only challenged students and their teachers; academic management have been forced to adapt the changing educational landscape. This has involved balancing the needs and requirements of various stakeholders while remaining faithful to a range of legal and moral obligations. We have made decisions relating to course design, pacing, assessment, and the management of our teaching staff. We have needed to consider the varying levels of technological expertise within our staff and their professional development needs. We have also had to ensure a careful balance between providing guidance and support for teachers while respecting their professional autonomy and judgment.

This year's ELT conference aims particularly at keeping abreast of the rapid change and innovative curricula that are currently being introduced by forward-thinking educators. The conference will be addressing a variety of topics concerning where the future of English teaching and learning is headed, as well as discussing ongoing professional development programs for teachers to improve upon their teaching. Regardless of whether the classroom is physical or virtual, our visions for the future will be built around the needs of our learners.

So we now look ahead to a diverse and stimulating virtual conference. The research findings, theoretical reflections and practical ideas presented in the conference may be challenging or conflicting, yet they will inspire us to develop our teaching in innovative ways. We hope that this will provide opportunities for interaction, reflection, and innovation. Before we begin, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the colleagues who have contributed to the organisation and reimagining of this conference. I would like to take a moment of your time to express my gratitude and appreciation to all my colleagues who have contributed to the organization and growth of this major professional event.

First and foremost, I would also thank the conference organizing committee and subcommittees for their outstanding and brilliant work. I am grateful to all the committee members, CPS IT team and teacher volunteers, for their valuable contributions. On behalf of the Centre for Preparatory Studies at Sultan Qaboos University, I would like to thank the university administration for their unfailing moral and financial support. I thank the University Press, Department of Public Relations, the Center for Information Systems, and the Center for Educational Technology at SQU for their help in preparing for our virtual conference.

Once again, I would like to thank you all for participating and being here with us. May it be a memorable and stimulating experience for all of us and guide us to build upon the past of English language teaching and envision its future.

CaRS MODEL FOR INTRODUCTION CHAPTER WRITING: STUDENT RESEARCHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES

Jamel Terzi Alimi

[A] paper that is designed for the external world needs to appropriately situate the work within the existing body of related research and attempt to attract an audience.
Swales & Feak (2012:328)

Abstract

The issue of knowledge and beliefs of student researchers concerning the use of Swales and Feak's 2004 Create-a-Research-Space (CaRS) Model for writing up introduction chapters remains under-researched worldwide and strikingly overlooked in Sultanate of Oman's higher-education institutions. This exploratory, quantitative study sought to critically describe the knowledge and perceptions of a group of student researchers concerning this very model. The data driven from an anonymized survey questionnaire yielded, amongst others, alarming inaccuracies about the correct sequencing and required content of the steps within each of the Model's moves as well as distinct differences in evaluating one's own success as to producing introduction chapters in strict adherence to the Model. The investigation's immediate implications for student researchers, mentors, and instructors are singled out.

Keywords: CaRS model; research chapter introduction; knowledge; attitudes; self-efficacy

1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to produce a well-structured introduction chapter for such genres as journal articles, research proposals, theses, and dissertations is considered more than essential (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 2012).

The reasons behind such a critical requirement are more than obvious. For one thing, an engaging, well-crafted introduction chapter is there to set the tone and stage for the entire study (Cheung, 2012). It also gives the reader the perspective they need to understand what it will entail in later sections (Fudhla et al., 2014; Weissberg & Buker, 1990). Moreover, it legitimates the research project being undertaken (Hood, 2011) and justifies the topic as being worthy of investigation (Jalilifar, 2010). Last but not least, it prepares the reader for the description of the study underway and the findings that will unfold subsequently (Cheung, 2012).

If, however, vague, error-filled, or without a sufficiently clear rhetorical structure, the introduction chapter would most expectedly not win the target reader's acceptance, as Samraj (2002) warns. Nor would it most evidently create and leave a positive impression in the readership as to the quality of the writer's writing style, analytical skills, and research approach as a whole, as Al-Khasawneh (2010) and Maznun et al. (2017) rightly argue.

Irrespective of what the academic writing genre is intended for, writing the introduction section in a way that fully adheres to CaRS guidelines (see Section Two for a succinct description) remains a typically hard and onerous task (Cargill & O'Connor, 2009; Flowerdew 1999; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). It is very much so for a considerable number of candidate researchers, be they novice or expert ones, in all contexts and fields indiscriminately. This arduousness is chiefly due to the latter's "bewilderment" as to how "skilfully organize or structure the introduction or, in other words, as to "what comes first and what should be written next," as Swales & Feak (2004) explain.

The above state of affairs concerns higher education (HE) contexts, too. The literature reveals that a large proportion of candidate student researchers find it extremely confusing as to what type of rhetorical and structural patterns they should follow and, accordingly, organize their compositions (Hirano, 2009; Stapa et al., 2014). More relevantly to our own study's topic, the literature reports that these students appear to confront tremendous problems in producing introduction chapters as per the three CaRS moves, in general, and in accordance with Move 2, "especially" (Maznun, Monsefi, & Nimehchisalem, 2017).

The problems mentioned above are not uncommon with Bachelor's and Master's Degree students in Sultanate of Oman's HE institutions—if only judging by a random reading of alumni graduates' end-year research manuscripts, by proofreading current students' research project drafts, or by anecdotal feedback and comments from students and supervisors alike whom we were closely working with at the time this study was conducted.

Despite the bulk of studies conducted here in the Sultanate on the various aspects of HE student compositions and research projects (see, for example, Al Seyabi & Tuzlukova, 2014; Busaidi & Al-Jamal, 2015), none of these have—to the best of our knowledge—empirically investigated the knowledge and views of research students regarding CaRS for writing up the bulkiest section in their research projects— namely, the Introduction Chapter.

This study, therefore, set out to address this gap in research by attempting to capture the state of knowledge of Bachelor /Master of Arts / Science students of the CaRS model as well as their self-appraisal of efficacy in writing a research's introduction chapter, as a case in point, in conformity to the model at issue. To this end, our investigation posed the following research questions:

- RQ1: How do student researchers appraise their state of knowledge of, and familiarity with, Swales and Feak's 2004 Create-A-Research-Space Model?
- RQ2: How accurate is their knowledge of the various rhetorical moves and steps in the said model?
- RQ3: How do they evaluate their efficacy in producing introduction chapter sections as per the model in question?

The answers to these critical questions were meant to be a valuable contribution to the body of literature in English Language writing genres in EFL/ESL contexts, in general, and to the community of end-year student researchers in Oman, in particular. Moreover,

the empirical pieces of evidence to emerge is hoped to provide essential information to help concerned mentors and instructors working with student writers.

The remainder of the present paper is divided into the following five sections: Conceptual Analysis Framework, Methodology, Data Results and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion.

2. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

The present study adopted the Swales and Feak's 2004 CaRS Model for both collecting and unpacking the knowledge and viewpoints of student researchers. This model contains three moves and a series of steps for each move. The moves are: establishing a research territory (Move 1), establishing a niche (Move 2), and occupying the niche (Move3). The steps are specific for each of the moves just named and must, as such, not be used interchangeable. They are obligatory, optional, or possible in some fields (PISF), as appropriate.

Table 1. Tabular representation of Swales and Feak's 2004 framework

Move 1— Establishing a research territory	
Step 1:	by showing that the general research area is important, central, interesting, problematic, or relevant in some way (optional)
Step 2:	by introducing and reviewing items of previous research in the area (obligatory)
Move 2—Establishing a niche	
Step 1A:	by indicating a gap in the previous research or
Step 1B:	by extending previous knowledge in some way (obligatory)
Move 3 — Occupying the niche	
Step 1:	by outlining purposes or stating the nature of the present research (obligatory)
Step 2*:	by listing research questions or hypotheses (*PISF**)
Step 3:	by announcing principal findings (*PISF*)
Step 4:	by stating the value of the present research (*PISF*)
Step 5:	by indicating the structure of the RP (*PISF*)
Notes:	- *PISF: Probable in Some Fields, but unlikely in others* - *Steps 2-4 are not only optional but less fixed in their order of occurrence than the others*

The Model (see Table 1 for a visual representation) advances that the writer needs a rhetorical structure for writing the research's introduction section in terms of their intended goals, current capacities, problems, and criteria of evaluation. It equally assumes that the author, in their quest for establishing a presence of theirs within a particular domain of research, needs to respond to two types of "competitions" or challenges: (a) the creation of a rhetorical space and (b) the attraction of the target reader into that very space created.

The CaRS, in its 2004 version, has, ever since, gained wide scholarly attention and triggered increasing criticism (See, for example, Samraj 2002 as well as other researchers mentioned in the References section below). According to Swales himself (2004), this move-analysis framework provides a tripartite schema that many academic disciplines

can simply and practically employ. According to Golebiowski and Liddicoat (2002), it is one of the most significant formulations for the structure of a research article introduction. Flowerdew (1999) views it as one of the most comprehensive and helpful frameworks for native- as well as non-native English writers when designing and writing up the introduction section. As for Dudley-Evans (2000:5), the Model "captures how academic writers justify and highlight their contribution to the ongoing research profile of the field." Many other researchers and critics such as Taylor and Chen (1991), Kafes (2012), and Fakhri (2004) firmly consider the said move-analysis framework as a viable tool for analyzing research introductions, in particular, and other research sections, in general.

Our selection of CaRS—in lieu of any other competing frameworks such as Dudley-Evans' 1997 Six- Move-structure Model, Bunton's 2002 Revised CARS Model, and Bhatia's 1993 Genre Analysis Model— was decided in consideration of two principal motives: (a) the fact that this framework was/is the one specifically taught and strongly recommended by the selected College's faculty who teach end-year programmes and (b) our expectation to see this very framework made use of in student end-year research projects' introduction section.

At a broader level, our selection of CaRS was opted for based on two dominant incentives: (a) the dearth (and indeed, most probably, inexistence) observed in research about this model in Oman's academic circles and (b) the absence, to the best of our knowledge, of any studies published to date that report on the views, attitudes, and knowledge status of student researchers in the Sultanate as to the framework here at issue.

The section below will shed light on the methodological aspects of the present mini-scale case study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Approach

The present study used a quantitative approach to address the research questions posed above. This adoption was triggered by the specifically exploratory and descriptive nature of the investigation, wherein we sought to establish statistically significant conclusions about the attitudes, opinions, and other phenomena or occurrences observed in a larger sample population (Allen, 2017; Creswell, 2003, 2015). It was additionally motivated by our quest for undertaking a broader study that would ensure greater objectivity and accuracy of results as well as a wider room for enhancing the generalization of the findings and facilitating their analysis and comparison with those in similar studies (De Vaus, 2001; McNabb, 2008).

3.2 Context and Participants

This study took place at a major private HE college in Muscat, Oman, from 12 to 16 January 2020, where the researcher is currently employed. This institution was selected out of convenience, its use of English as the sole medium of instruction across all the different disciplines it runs, and its long-established tradition in prescribing written end-year research projects.

The participants were Bachelor's and Master's Degree-level students. They were selected purposively on the grounds of their accessibility (Cresswell, 2015) as well as their engagement in end-of-year academic research projects, where the introduction chapter constitutes an indispensable, compulsory section and requires lots of rigour, systematicity, and craftsmanship in both design and production (Hyland, 2005).
The targeted subjects answered the study's questionnaire on an entirely voluntary basis. They were assured both orally and in writing that all of their responses were to be kept confidential and used exclusively for the purpose of the present research (see Appendix for the introductory address to students in the questionnaire).

3.3 Study Instrument Description

The research's anonymized survey questionnaire (Appendix Section) drew on the literature on academic writing, in general, and on the CaRS model, in particular. It comprised two main sections: (a) research students' demographics and (b) Questionnaire items. The former aimed at surveying participants' background information— including age, gender, nationality, level of education, and specialization. The latter covered statements/questions that fell under three distinct but inter-complementary themes: (a) students' perceptions of their current state of knowledge of the CaRS model; (b) their knowledge of the Model; and (c) their appraisal of their own efficacy as to writing introduction chapters following the Model's guidelines.

The research instrument was, in most part, a knowledge questionnaire. A knowledge questionnaire (KQ) is a series of content-based questions each of which is designed "to capture the extent to which people have stored factual information in long-term memory and how well they can retrieve and respond with that information when asked a survey question about a given topic" (Kenski, 2008: 412). In KQs, students do not answer the questions; rather, they rank their confidence in their ability to answer each question (Nuhfer and Delores, 2003).

The questionnaire was tested by the researcher, at the start of January 2020, with a mixed group of BA and MA/MSc students (n=10). They were asked to tick all the items with readability and understandability issues. It was then thoroughly revised for validity, coverage, and linguistic appropriateness to collect the required information from the targeted population at a later stage.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The investigator and three colleagues of his distributed the questionnaire hand to hand in print form at the start of three lecture contact hours with BA, and MA/MSc research students during the period of 12-16 January 2020. Prior to completion, the participants were presented with a very brief introduction to the purpose of the research. They were also explicitly reminded of their full right *not* to participate in the investigation at hand if they ever wished. Besides, they were strongly assured that their participation would be strictly confidential and anonymous (Ferguson, Yonge & Myrick, 2004).

The questionnaire was administered following ethical approval from the college selected. It took a maximum of 25 minutes for completion and return. Any doubts regarding the

wording of any of its items were attended to and clarified by the investigator and/or his colleague in charge of the class.

3.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Section Two of the questionnaire survey comprised three themes [A, B, & C]. Theme [B] contained 10 statements/questions each, wherein the participant had an option to answer by putting a circle around "True," "False," or "I Don't Know," as that would apply to them personally. For the purpose of calculation, each knowledge item obtained a score of "1" (one) for the correct answer (which could be "True" or "False" depending, obviously, on the statement/question provided opposite) and "0" (zero) for wrong or "I Do not Know" answers (Ibrahim et al., 2013). The maximum possible score was 10 for Theme B-statements/questions.

Themes [A & C], for their part, consisted of five attitude items altogether. They used a five-category Likert scale to elicit the participant's feelings, positions, and attitudes vis-à-vis each of the statement prompts. Likert-scale questions are used in this survey questionnaire because they are "the most commonly used type of instrument for measuring affective variables such as motivation and self-efficacy," and they allow researchers to gather "large amounts of data with relative ease" (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014: 1).

Mean score percentages for answers to statements/questions for Themes [A, B, and C] were divided into 1-19%, 20-49%, 50-69%, 70-89% and 90-100% of the maximum possible score were considered as *Poor*, *Average*, *Good*, *Very Good*, and *Excellent* performance, respectively.

All questionnaire-driven data were analyzed by means of Microsoft Excel™ 2013. This software was selected because it provides "tremendous flexibility and automation in an organization, visualization, and analysis of the data" obtained (Fuller, 2011:1) and functions as "an efficient and effective data analysis application" for the novice as well as expert researchers alike (Frey, 2018). All frequencies and percentages of responses were presented in tables and graphs, as will be shown in the Data Results section to follow.

4. DATA RESULTS

This section first gives a brief description of the study participants obtained from the survey's Background Section. It will then present the findings for each of the three research questions.

4.1 Respondents' Profile

Analysis of Section One of the survey questionnaire showed that a total of fifty-six (n = 56) BA, MA, and MSc students participated in the current study. Four out of them were

not considered for study results and analysis. They stated they did not know anything about the CaRS Model and/or had never used it for writing their End-year Project's Introduction Chapter and, accordingly, decided not to continue with answering the rest of the questionnaire items.

The remainder (30 males and 22 females.) were fifty full-timers and two part-timers in a blended learning format. They had spent 4 to 5 years in higher education when this study was conducted. They together fell under two distinct age groups: 21-25 years of age (n= 41) and 26-30 (n= 11). They came from seven different countries: Oman, India, Pakistan, Jordan, Tunisia, Turkey, and Iraq.

4.2 Answers to Research Questions

RQ1: How do student researchers appraise their current state of knowledge of, and familiarity with, Swales and Feak's 2004 Create-A-Research-Space Model?

Figure 1 below illustrates the responses, in percentages, of BA and MA student researcher participants regarding how they generally perceived their then-current state of knowledge about the Swales and Feak's 2004 model. Overall, there was a substantively huge gap in self-appraisal between the two groups of study participants, with a clear advantage to MA and MSc students.

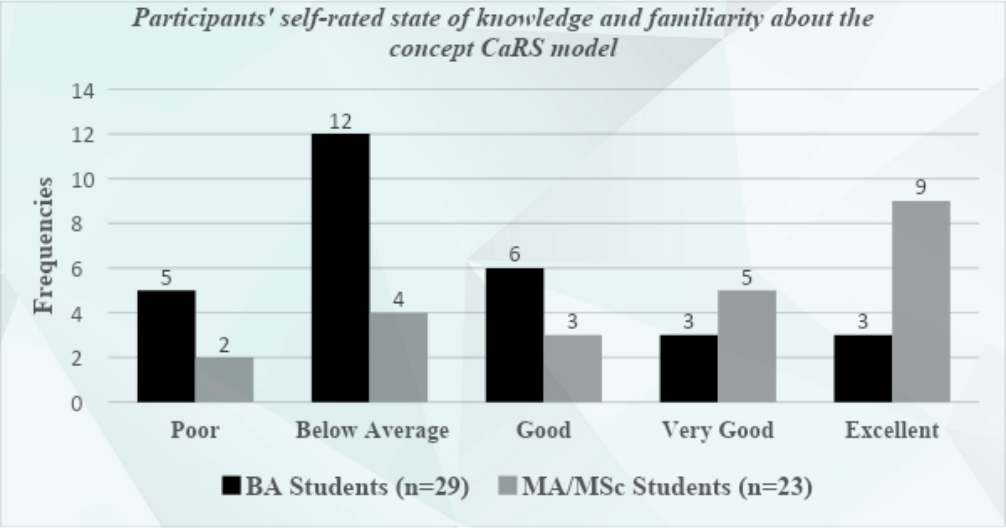

Figure 1: Participants' self-revaluation of their current state of knowledge and familiarity about the general concept of the "Create-a-Research-Space" model

As indicated, a total of 17 (58.62 %) BA respondents described their level of knowledge and familiarity with the said model, as a concept, as "Poor" or "Below Average". Approximately 21% of them affirmed they had a "Good" cognizance and acquaintance level thereof. The rest asserted having a "Very Good" or an "Excellent" grip of the Model.

As for the MA/MSc participants, their self-ratings predominantly ranged between "Good" through "Very Good" and "Excellent", with occurrences of 3 (13.04 %), 5 (21.73 %), and 9 (39.13 %), respectively. Only 2 out of 23 (8.69 %) declared having a "Poor" cognizance and acquaintance with the concept of issue. Slightly over 17% were of the

opinion that their knowledgeability and familiarity level with the said framework was "Below Average".

In terms of excellence, two (or 6.90 %) out of 29 BA subjects described their knowledgeability of the Feak-Swalesian model as excellent, which was more or less three times less than that of their MA/MSc counterparts. The contrast was even sharper with a lower degree of cognizance wherein 13.79% of BA subjects stated their present knowledgeability about the said model was "Below Average"—thus, falling nearly four times behind their MA/MSc colleagues.

In terms of certainty, as up as 31.03% of BA subjects expressed their hesitation as to describing their familiarity with the model at issue with exactness. This percentage was counterweighed by those counted for "Above Average" and "Below Average"— 41.38% and 6.90%, correspondingly.

Insofar as MA/MSc student researchers are concerned, their self-ratings predominantly ranged between "Very Good" to "Excellent," with a frequency of 12 (52.17%) and 5 (21.74%), respectively. One out of 23 (4.35 %) declared him/herself not particularly sure about their cognizance with the CARS model. Nearly a fifth was of the opinion that their familiarity with the framework at hand was either "About Average" or "Below Average", with 13.04% and 8.70%, correspondingly.

RQ2: How accurate is the student researchers' knowledge of the various rhetorical moves and steps in the CaRS model?

Figure 2 below contrasts the accuracy of the surveyed BA and MA/MSc student researchers regarding 10 aspects and characteristics of the rhetorical moves and steps in the Swales-Feak's 2004 Model. Overall, based on the computed results, most BA student participants showed shaky information about the CaRS Model. Approximately 37% of the answers they gave proved incorrect while over 24% fell under the "I Don't Know" heading. Added together, the two categories of answers largely outnumbered those of "Correct answers" by 66 points or 22.77%.

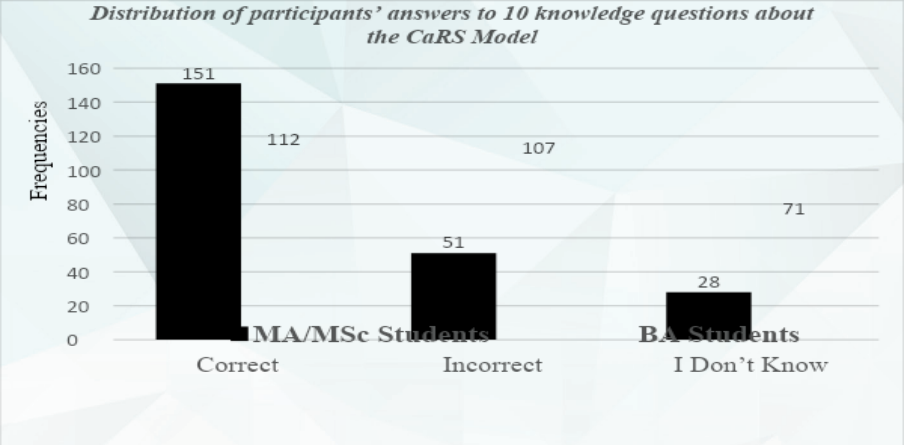

Figure 2: Distribution of participants' knowledge results on 10 knowledge statements /questions

In contrast with their BA peers, MA/MSc respondents demonstrated a much better grasp of, and familiarity with, the Model understudy— hardly reaching around percentage of

66% for accuracy, though. They specifically showed a heightened awareness of what a typical writer does precisely in a given step within a particular CaRS move. This accuracy was 27.03% comparatively higher. As yet, the 151 correct answers represented almost twice the number for both “Incorrect” and "I Don’t Know" answers, which amounted to 79 (or 34.34%) altogether. The sub-parts to follow will briefly describe the knowledge–related results in terms of steps and moves.

Knowledge Items (KIs) 1-4: The first set of these *KI*s tested the study groups’ knowledge concerning four selected aspects of steps in Move 1 (see Table 2). Of 208 answers, 60 (28.84%) were inaccurate and 47 (22.59%) fell under the “I Don’t Know” category. These two scores counter-balanced the 101 accurate results by a margin of 6 points ahead.

Table 2: Participants’ knowledge of Steps in Move 1 in the CaRS Model

S.N	*Knowledge* items – Set A	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	“I Don’t Know” Answers
1.	In Step 1 in Move 1 (Establishing a Territory), the writer claims the centrality of the problem in a current policy or professional issue.	20	21	11
2.	In Step 2 in Move 1, the writer reviews relevant items of previous research about the problem under investigation in order to establish a niche for his/her research.	27	11	14
3.	In Step 2 in Move 1, the writer makes the topic generalizations about the problem, which will be generally accepted.	29	13	10
4.	In Step 3 in Move 1, the writer reviews relevant items of previous research about the problem under investigation in order to establish a niche for his/her research.	25	15	12
Totals/Percentages (out of 208):		101 48.55%	60 28.84%	47 22.59%

***KI*s 5-7:** The second set of *KI*s (Table 3) tested respondents’ accuracy concerning the appropriate employment of steps in the “Establishing a Niche” Move. The results disclosed a more or less evenness in response frequencies, overall. Less than 50% out of 52 correctly decided that in Step 1 in Move 2, a typical writer counter-claims a position related to policy, practice, or the extant literature. Data regarding *KI 6* on whether the writer would signpost the structure of the document to come in Step 2 showed a correctness score of mere 27 whilst the correctness frequency for *KI 7* fell by one point behind.

Table 3: Participants' knowledge of Steps in Move 2 in the CaRS Model

S.N	*Knowledge* items – Set B	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	"I Don't Know" Answers
5.	In Step 1 in Move 2 (Establishing a Niche), the writer counter-claims a position in relation to policy, practice, or the extant literature.	22	22	8
6.	In Step 2 in Move 2, the writer signposts the structure of the document to come.	27	18	7
7.	In Step 2 in Move 2, the writer indicates a gap in policy, practice, or the extant literature.	26	20	6
Totals/Percentages (out of 156):		75 48.07%	60 38.46%	21 13.46%

KIs 8-10*:* The third and last set of *KI*s (Table 4) tested respondents' knowledge of the right steps to use in Move 3. As yielded, the highest percentage of the three can hardly be rounded up to 56% and it led the percentages of "Incorrect" and "I Don't Know" answers together by merely a 6-percent margin at best.

Table 4: Participants' knowledge of Steps in Move 3 in the CaRS Model

S.N	*Knowledge* items – Set C	Correct Answers	Incorrect Answers	"I Don't Know" Answers
8.	In Step 1 in Move 3 (Occupying the niche), the writer puts his/her work into perspective by demonstrating that his/her general area of research is important or otherwise worthy of investigation.	25	16	11
9	In Step 3 in Move 3, the writer occupies the niche by announcing principal findings.	31	12	9
10.	In Step 4 in Move 3, the writer occupies the niche by stating the value of the present research.	31	10	11
Totals/Percentages (out of 156):		87 55.76%	38 24.35%	31 19.87%

To conclude with, the results of RQ2 unveiled that the student researchers under study had, in general, a rather average level of knowledge or accuracy (50.79%) with regard to Feak-Swalesian model, if and when judging by the results for the ten selected aspects of the CaRS moves and steps shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4. They also unfolded high means of "Incorrect" and "I Don't Know" answers that, when added up, formed almost 100% *counterweight.*

RQ3: How do the student researchers evaluate their own efficacy as to producing introduction chapter sections as per the CaRS model?

Figure 3 shows the results of BA and MA/MSc student self-evaluated efficacy as to producing a full, complete introduction chapter for their individual end-of-year research

projects; self-efficacy is here used to mean a personal judgment of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura 1982: 122–147).

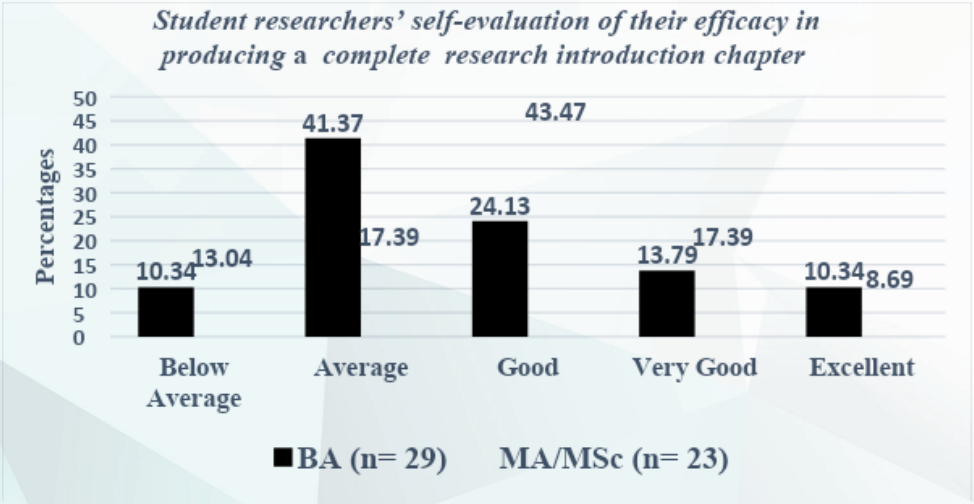

Figure 3: Student researchers' self-evaluation of their efficacy in producing introduction chapters as per the CaRS Model

The questionnaire-based percentages yielded, in general, higher senses of self-efficacy amongst MA/MSc students. They did not, though, give way to a significantly huge gap in self-appraisal between the two groups of respondents, as that may most particularly be noticed in results in the twin bars referring to "Below Average", "Very Good", and "Excellent" scales. The "Average" percentage bar for BA student participants along with the "Good" percentage one for their MA/MSc peers stood out as the two most salient features of the way respondents judged how well they individually could execute courses of action required to write up a reasonably acceptable end-year research project's introduction chapter (Bandura 1982).

Computation of student self-efficacy frequencies, from a unique angle of the CaRS moves, revealed that participants' self-declared performances in establishing a territory, establishing a niche, and occupying the niche were alarmingly below average standards. As indicated in Table 5 below, the highest total score allocated under the "Very Good" to "Excellent" Scales was 65 out of 156 and, thus, constituted only 41.66 per cent. The results were even graver in the "Below Average/Average" column, where self-efficacy bottomed to almost one-third in percentage terms. Interestingly, the frequency occurrences under the "Good" scale heading were almost exactly the same all across the three moves—within a range of 13 to 15— but seriously falling at 26.92 %.

Table 5: Student researchers' self-evaluation of their efficacy in producing introduction chapters Move-wise

S.N	Moves/ Scales	BA	A	G	VG	E
2.	Establishing a territory	22 (42.30 %)		15 (*28.84 %)*	15 (5.76 %)	
3.	Establishing a niche	12 (23.07 %)		14 (*26.92%)*	26 (50 %)	
4.	Occupying the niche	15 (28.84 %)		13 (25 %)	24 (46.15 %)	
Totals (out of 156)		49 (31.41 %)		42 (26.92 %)	65 (41.66 %)	

(Scale Key: BA= Below Average; A= Average; G= Good; VG= Very Good; E= Excellent)

The present sub-section sought to report the results of the second research question guiding this investigation. The data yielded the following main outcome: an exhibition of distinct differences in self-efficacy as to producing introduction chapters in strict terms of the CaRS model's move structure. The different results reported above are discussed in detail in the discussion section to follow.

5. DISCUSSION

The study's data results unveiled three main outcomes: (a) the existence of a substantively huge gap in respondents' self-rating of their current state of knowledge about the "Create-a-Research-Space" model, with a conspicuous advantage to MA and MSc students; (b) rather shaky information about the structure and organization of CaRS, as evidenced by the high frequency of responses under the "Incorrect" and "I Don't Know" headings as well as the inaccuracies in matching steps with their corresponding moves; and (c) the acknowledgement of possessing a very modest performance and skill about how to produce excellent introduction chapters as per the CaRS guidelines.

This study is, to the best of our knowledge, the first of its kind carried out among research students with a special focus on their knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy regarding the above-mentioned Model. Therefore, we could not establish any direct corroboration and/or comparison with existing literature given the unavailability of published research from the very perspective we had taken.

Indirectly, though, our investigation does support the findings of innumerable studies in the field. To start with, it re-affirms the views of, for example, Fudhla, Rozimela & Ningsih (2014), which stress the importance and applicability of the rhetorical moves for establishing a territory and ending up with occupying the niche. In addition, it supports the positions that trace students' difficulties in academic writing back to such sources as unawareness of the appropriate rhetorical structure of the introduction section (Yuen & Mussa, 2015), lack of complete "understanding of the conventions governing written

academic discourse and the thinking processes involved in realizing these conventions" (Chandrasegaran, 2012), and an "apparently constrained, faulty understanding of writing chapter introductions as per the CaRS model" (Fudhla, Rozimiela & Ningsih, 2014). It also stands by recommendations that highlight the need for mastering the Feak-Swalesian framework in order to write up the introduction chapter or section in any written-up research project effectively (Broines, 2012).

Moreover, based on the RQ2 results on the rhetorical CaRS moves and steps, our study holds that the majority of the study participants had serious problems in identifying what has to go in what section of their thesis introduction chapter, which denoted a severely insufficient clarity about the different moves and steps as exactly in Swales and Feak's 2004 description. This conclusion agrees with other ones arrived at by, for instance, Samraj (2002, 2005) and Cheung (2012).

The present study emphatically suggests a huge scope for a deeper engagement on the part of project supervisors—most prominently, taking up a constant involvement in the student learning process and students' feelings of competence (self-efficacy) (Ayllo´n, Alsina, & Colomer, 2019; Chickering & Gamson 1987; Dall'Alba, 1994; Fry et al., 2009; Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002).

Last but not least, a perusal of the results of RQ1 on the rhetorical moves and steps in the CaRS model indicates that most of the responses were either incorrect or of an *I-Don't-know* type. This-suggests that the majority of the study participants had serious problems in identifying without any mistake or misunderstanding what goes what in each section of the introduction chapter in their Bachelor's and Master's research projects. This observation validates conclusions arrived at in previous studies that investigated movement in CaRS model on the introduction of the master thesis (see, for instance, Samraj 2002, 2005 and Cheung 2012). In contrast with previous literature, our study holds that student researchers suffer from a lack of sufficient clarity about the different steps assigned to specific moves (Swales and Feak 2004) and strongly suggests that this ample unclarity would impact very negatively the structure and organization of the introduction section if it should be based on this very model of writing.

The conclusion section to follow will briefly highlight the main observations of the current study, foreground fundamental limitations detected, pinpoint some of the most pertinent implications for practice, and suggest directions for future research that stem from the present investigation.

6. CONCLUSION

This quantitative questionnaire-based study sought to explore and critically describe the knowledge and conceptions of a group of tertiary-level research students concerning the Swales-Feak's 2004 CaRS model, with a particular focus on introduction chapters in theses and dissertations.

Three main points can be concluded from the evidences presented in this paper: (a) the existence of a substantial gap in respondents' self-rating of their current state of knowledge of, and familiarity with, the model at issue, with a visible lead in favour of

MA and MSc students; (b) rather shaky information about the structure and organization of CaRS; and (c) the acknowledgement of a quite modest self-sense of efficacy as to how to produce very-good-to-excellent introduction chapters in congruence with the Model's guidelines.

The points mentioned just above have considerable learning/teaching implications for both HE student researchers and instructors/ supervisors. The former can thus more or less exactly measure their existing knowledge of the CaRS model and specify the problematic areas they might very well have when writing up their theses and dissertations, in general, and the introduction chapter thereof, in particular. The latter can focus more on the areas of difficulty pointed out above, both in and out of the lecture room, and work out how best they can informedly attend to them. Both implications are hoped to help enhance the effectiveness and quality of the end-year research projects that are due for submission shortly and after that.

Given its exploratory and interpretive nature, our study fell short of shaping an all-round idea about the CaRS-related knowledge and perceptions of end-year student researchers. Nonetheless, it does raise a number of opportunities for further research on the writing skills of BA, MA, and MSc students in terms of their knowledgeability, know-how, and can-do. Future works would do well to use mixed-methods approaches for the purpose of triangulation, and to be conducted at two or more educational settings for generalizability considerations, and recruit much larger population samples for extensive coverage and representation quests. This will help refine and extend our own findings.

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APPENDIX:

Student Questionnaire

CaRS Model for Introduction Chapter Writing: Student Researchers' Knowledge and Attitudes

Dear Student,

I am carrying out research entitled "CaRS Model for Introduction Chapter Writing: Student Researchers' Knowledge and Attitudes." CaRS stands for Create-A-Research-Space (Swales 1990, Swales & Feak 2004). The model attempts to explain the organizational pattern of writing the introduction to scholarly research studies. I am particularly interested in getting feedback about your state of knowledge of this model, as well as your success or failure in writing the introduction chapter based on this model. Your participation in this study is very important and will contribute to understanding better the challenges and successes of end-year students in producing their projects assignments, in general, and the introductory chapter, in particular.

Please respond to the items in this questionnaire as carefully and openly as possible. Your answers will remain strictly confidential and used for the present research.

If you are interested in knowing about the results of this investigation, please do not hesitate to contact me at jamel@mec.edu.om to get your soft copy of it.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and cooperation.

Jamel Alimi
Senior Lecturer, Middle East College- Oman

Section 1	Background information

Please provide your personal information by putting a circle around the option that represents your answer.

- Gender: A. Male B. Female
- Age Group: A. 20-25 B. 26-30 C. 31-35 D. 36 or Over
- Student Status: A. Full-timer B. Part-timer
- Current Program Level: A. Diploma Program B. Bachelor Program
  C. Master of Arts D. Master of Science
- Nationality: A. Omani b. Non-Omani (please specify) _____
- Discipline you are in:
  A. Department of Mechanical Engineering B. Department of Civil Engineering
  C. Department of Electronics and Communication D. Department of Computing
  E. Department of Mathematics & Applied Sciences

Section 2	Question Sets

1. **1A. When did you first come to know about the CaRS Model? Please put a check mark (√) in the box that applies to you.**

A.	I do not know anything about the CARS Model. It is the first time ever I have heard of the CaRS Model.	
B.	Only this academic year's semester.	
C.	In previous academic year's semesters.	

1B. Have you ever used the CaRS Model for writing your Assignment's /End-year Project's Introduction Chapter. Please put a check mark (√) in the box that applies to you.

A.	Yes	
B.	No	

Very important!
If your answers to Questions 1A and/or 1B just above are Options A, please stop at this point and do not continue with answering the rest of this Questionnaire. Thank you!

2. **How do you describe your present knowledge and familiarity about the different steps in the CaRS Model? Please put a circle around the option that represents your answer.**

P= Poor	BA= Below Average	G= Good	VG= Very Good	E= Excellent

Statement	Options				
My present knowledge and familiarity about the different steps in the CaRS Model is…	P	BA	G	VG	E

3. Please decide if the following statements are true or false. Please circle the option that indicate your answer. If you cannot decide on whether the statement is true or false, please circle the "I Don't Know" option.

Statements		Options		
		True	False	I Don't Know
1.	In Step 1 in Move 1 (Establishing a Territory), the writer claims the centrality of the problem in a current policy or professional issue	T	F	I Don't Know
2.	In Step 2 in Move 1, the writer reviews relevant items of previous research about the problem under investigation in order to establish a niche for his/her research.	T	F	I Don't Know
3.	In Step 2 in Move 1, the writer make the topic generalizations about the problem which will be generally accepted.	T	F	I Don't Know
4.	In Step 3 in Move 1, the writer reviews relevant items of previous research about the problem under investigation in order to establish a niche for his/her research.	T	F	I Don't Know
5.	In Step 1 in Move 2 (Establishing a Niche), the writer counter-claims a position in relation to policy, practice or the extant literatures.	T	F	I Don't Know
6.	In Step 2 in Move 2, the writer signposts the structure of the document to come.	T	F	I Don't Know
7.	In Step 2 in Move 2, the writer indicates a gap in policy, practice or the extant literatures.	T	F	I Don't Know
8.	In Step 1 in Move 3 (Occupying the niche), the writer puts his/her work into perspective by demonstrating that his/her general area of research is important or otherwise worthy of investigation.	T	F	I Don't Know
9	In Step 3 in Move 3, the writer occupies the niche by announcing principal findings.	T	F	I Don't Know
10.	In Step 4 in Move 3, the writer occupies the niche by stating the value of the present research.	T	F	I Don't Know

.

4. How do you describe your present capability to do the actions {A – D) below? Please circle the option that represents your answer, by using this scale:

BA= Below Average	A= Average	G= Good	VG= Very Good	E= Excellent

Statements		Perceived Levels of Capability				
A.	I can successfully produce a full introduction chapter for my end-of-year research project.	BA	A	G	VG	E
B.	I can write a section that aims to establish a territory **[the situation]** in my end-year project's Introduction Chapter.	BA	A	G	VG	E
C.	I can write a section that aims to establishing a niche [the situation] in my end-year project's Introduction Chapter.	BA	A	G	VG	E
D.	I can write a section that aims to occupy the niche [the solution] in my end-year project's Introduction Chapter	BA	A	G	VG	E

Considerations for L2 English Grammar Input Paradigms at Tertiary Education in Oman

Ibrahim Al Mounla

Abstract

An L2 teacher's preference for explicit or implicit grammar teaching probably would arise from the following stated (but not limited to) three situations. Firstly, it is either careful scrutiny of all the pertinent studies in the area. Secondly, it would perhaps merely be a subject of predisposition. Hence it could be a component of a compulsory syllabus and curriculum, or it could equally be their personal preference to expose students to grammar. Thirdly, it may even be the case that an instructor received explicit grammar instruction in language/s they have studied and unquestioningly reflected that they would consider teaching it to their students. This third situation applies to me as an EFL teacher who has been in the profession of teaching for over a quarter of a century. Grammar instruction is a task teachers across the board, inexperienced and accomplished, are expected to consider. This topical issue is important to TEFL, TESOL, Materials Development and Assessment, and Language Teaching techniques courses in our CAS Colleges programme at UTAS.
This journal article is a literature review of the current theories and deliberations on L2 English grammar instruction methods.

Keywords*:* Explicit teaching (learning), exhibiting input, implicit teaching

Overview of the Context of L2 Education in Oman

Oman recognized the global significance of English. When the late Qaboos bin Said became Sultan in the1970s, Oman started implementing changes and witnessed massive investment in Education through a number of five-year plans and strategic vision plans such as Vision 2020 and currently, Vision 2040. In this context, two educationally and academically influential ministries, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the then Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) (but now the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Innovation) have been the driving force in sharing the responsibility for offering education to the Omanis.

The MoE asked a team of specialists to write a report on setting an English language curriculum in schools across the Sultanate. In their report, Nunan et al. (1987:1) emphasized the essential role of English '…as the means for wider communications within the international community'. Thus, the MoE include the English Language Curriculum Department (ELCD) as one of its structural components to design school books for different levels. In his assessment of these books, Al-Issa (2006: 200) points out that they are 'teacher-proof', i.e., teachers find it challenging and difficult to teach these books to students.

Al-Issa (2006) and Borg (2006) point out that all tertiary education is officially taught using English in Oman, including the Colleges of Applied Sciences (CASs). In this regard, the MoHE selected "New Headway Plus: Digital Edition" book series for its foundation programme. One can safely say that these books are culture and student

oriented, in that these they are designed concerning the Middle Eastern culture and values with carefully selected and controlled language to suit the learning level of the students entering the foundation programme.

As teachers in this programme, we see that these books do not seem to focus and give enough attention to grammar instruction. They offer grammar components inside the units under the title 'GRAMMAR SPOT' but give only very short and fragmented exercises and scant explanation of rules that learners cannot grasp when they have very little opportunity to do grammar exercises. And when it comes to the somehow useful grammar instruction input, these books relegate and embed it in the grammar reference section right at the end of the books. So, ironically, one can imagine the importance these books attach to grammar instruction input.

In his explication of de Saussure's notion of language and methods of language teaching, i.e. Grammar Translation and Direct Method, among other things, Hornby 1946a took langue and parole to respectively mean 'code and activity'. He stressed that adult language learners could benefit most when dealing with code; namely, grammars and lexicons.

As can be realized, the topic of grammar instruction relates to teachers, material developers and curriculum designers catering to learners of all ages, genders, backgrounds and proficiency levels. The onus is on us as EFL teachers to be familiar with the research in the pertinent areas of study to be able to make informed decisions about grammar instruction. Surely with such a controversially debated topic, there will always be different opinions as scholars have a wide spectrum of positions on this issue. Some fervently champion explicit grammar instruction; others opt for moderation, yet others consider it a counterproductive, if not worthless, task.

Contemporary considerations on the downside and plus side of teaching Grammar

It is generally viewed that the condition of L2 Grammar teaching has been at its lowest ebb and has almost faded away in the L2 classroom since the spread of the Communicative (CLT) approach. The 1980s and onwards consequently celebrated the heyday of L2 grammar teaching following its demise in the 1970s. We will consider a number of arguments that L2 grammar teaching has become a respectable and significant substitute for CLT by analyzing the advantages of explicit and implicit (tacit) L2 grammar teaching strategy.

The 1970s witnessed the advent of the communicative methodologies, which resulted in relegating the teaching of grammar in foreign language learning to a secondary position and throwing the baby out with the bathwater. However, contemporary investigations have shown the urgency for academic instruction of grammar for learners to acquire lofty levels of efficiency and accuracy. This effort has culminated in a renewed interest in bringing the teaching of grammar in foreign language learning back to the fore. Thus, grammar in foreign and second language acquisition has occupied the centre stage of many recent studies. In this section, we give a succinct review of the extensive increase in investigations on grammar teaching following the rise of the Communicative school of thought. In doing so, we tackle two contentious core issues: (1) to what extent grammar

instruction is helpful and causes improvement to language learning; and (2) what types of grammar teaching are needed to aid and promote second language learning.
Following a long-standing tradition of debate and deliberation as to whether grammar should be a fundamental target of language teaching, should be ignored, or should be the instrument for a meaning-focused representation of the target language (for historical reviews see Howatt, 1984; Kelly, 1969), the longing for grammar teaching is once more causing contemplation of scholars and language practitioners in second language acquisition (SLA). Below is a brief review of the pros and cons of grammar teaching, followed by an examination of the approaches to grammar instruction in existing studies.

The downside of grammar input

Cognitive Psychology cast doubt on the role of teaching grammar prompted by the conscious approach of learning a language and essentially unconscious processes upheld when learners are immersed in the language's milieu (Bialystok, 1990, 1994; N. Ellis, 1994; Reber,1967, 1989, 1993). The adherents of this view were directly influenced by Krashen's (1981) dichotomy between conscious learning, and unconscious acquisition of language, where he alleged that language acquisition could only take root when people are naturally exposed to language input and that formal instruction will not lead to language learning as these two forms of knowledge, i.e., conscious and unconscious learning are different systems and as such, they are stored in different compartments in the brain. (see studies by DeKeyser, 1998, 2001; R. Ellis, 2001, 2002a; Skehan, 1998). Hence, it was believed that a disciplined or academic teaching of grammar would nurture analytical and interpretive knowledge in students; students can produce grammatical and correct sentences but then they would lack communicative ability of language use. Also, the teacher becomes the controller of the teaching classroom, the sole activity of which is only grammar. That's a teacher-centred method of teaching.

Studies on the acquisition of English morphology provide evidence that users of diverse first languages (L1s) showed no difference in learning English morphemes; namely, they learnt them in a similar order (Bailey, Madden, & Krashen, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1974). These findings supported the postulate that L1 and L2 shared similar intrinsic language learning processes (Krashen, 1981; Schwartz, 1993; Zobl, 1995). Schwartz (1993, 147), for instance, writes that "only positive data can affect the construction of an *interlanguage grammar* [the emphasis is the author's] that is comparable to the knowledge system that characterizes the result of first language acquisition". Related input is shown by Universal Grammar (UG) in the framework of its pertinence to SLA. Researchers contended that if UG is available to L2 learners, then L2 learning, like L1 learning, takes place essentially via the interface or cooperation of UG principles with input (Cook, 1991; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Schwartz, 1993; also see DeKeyser, 2001). Once more, formal teaching was considered to be irrelevant.

The plus side of grammar input

Nonetheless, recent TEFL studies have turned the table against opponents of grammar instruction's pivotal role in the L2 classroom. A number of good reasons are suggested to reconceptualise grammar teaching as a crucial part and parcel of language instruction.

Firstly, some dilemmas beset the communicative assumption of language teaching in that language can be learned without some amount of awareness. Schmidt (1990, 1993, and 2001) theorizes that mindful and deliberate study of form, in his phraseology, "noticing," (Schmidt, 2001, p.3). "The concept of attention is necessary in order to understand virtually every aspect of second language acquisition (SLA), including the development of interlanguages (ILs) over time, variation within IL at particular points in time, the development of L2 fluency, the role of individual differences such as motivation, aptitude and learning strategies in L2 learning,…and all forms of instruction contribute to language learning." is a prerequisite condition for a language to be learnt. Schmidt notes that when learners purposely attend to studying a language focusing on all its components, this effort will undoubtedly culminate in them developing their interlanguages (ILs) over time.
Many researchers of L2 champion Schmidt's assumption of noticing, i.e. the intentional and cognizant study of foreign language forms in L2 learning (e.g., Bialystok, 1994; Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001; DeKeyser, 1998, Doughty, 2001; R. Ellis, 2001, 2002a; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b; Fotos, 1993, 1994, 1998; Nassaji, 1999, 2000, 2002; Nassaji & Swain, 2000; Robinson, 1995, 2001; Skehan, 1998).

Skehan (1998) and Tomasello (1998) have even gone further to publish their findings that demonstrate that L2 learners do not have the capability of synchronized assimilation of both meaning and form of L2 information. So for Skehan and Tomasello (ibid), noticing L2 forms is a much needed aid for global English learners, the absence of which may make L2 learners tackle target language input for meaning only and do not focus on specific forms, where ultimately no learning will take place. The fact that there existed a good bulk of research supporting Schmidt's point of view of noticing theory does not mean that it is taken for granted, see Truscott's, 1998 controversy).

Secondly, the heyday of formal instruction of grammar has gathered augmented pace boosted by further evidence supporting its positive effects from Pienmann's (1984, 1985, 1988) Learnability (Teachability) Hypothesis. Pienemann points out that throughout their successive stages of learning, L2 learners simplify target language structures by dismantling them into smaller manageable units in a stable pattern of learning. According to evidence from German learners of English, Pienemann notes that while formal teaching of grammar has benefited L2 learners in learning certain linguistic structures along the L2 continuum, there remained other structures which presented L2 learners with some potentially insurmountable challenges. Pienemann suggests that the readier and alert L2 learners are, the higher the acquisition processes are. He sees no role for environment and context of learning as such. So if grammar instruction and willingness and keenness of L2 learners go hand in hand, it is assumed-that L2 learners may move to the next stage of linguistic proficiency (Lightbown, 2000). This view seems to have been recently taken on board by language practitioners with communicative teaching slant (Ellis, 2002b).

Thirdly, a considerable amount of research that applied meaning-focused teaching, but overlooked grammar instruction, has been characterized as deficient. Learning outcomes in French immersion curriculum did not attain accuracy in certain grammatical forms even though learners have been exposed to rich and purposeful input (Harley & Swain, 1984; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1991; Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1989). Their research showed that focus on form was substantial if learners were to establish sizeable level of

accuracy in L2. This lends support to the argument that CLT cannot do it alone as its teaching tenets promoted learners' communicative competence but demoted their structural competence. Also, see Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1997; R. Ellis, 1997, 2002b; Mitchell, 2000.

Fourthly, advantages of the inclusion of grammar teaching in the L2 classroom emanates from positive effects of grammar instruction in a sizable number of laboratory and classroom-based research, including voluminous analyses of debates on the effects of teaching for the past two decades (R. Ellis, 1985, 1990, 1994, 2001, 2002a; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Long, 1983, 1988, 1991). Investigations of the benefits of instruction on the evolvement of certain L2 forms (e.g., Cadierno, 1995; Doughty, 1991; Lightbown,1992; Lightbown & Spada, 1990) exclusion of corrective feedback on learner errors (Carroll & Swain, 1993; Nassaji & Swain, 2000) illustrates that teaching grammar plays an important role in the attainment of accuracy. R. Ellis (1990, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2002a), N. Ellis (1995), and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) point out that, while instructed language learning may not show big effects on the progression of acquisition, it provides conducive and helpful results on the rate and level of L2 acquisition.

According to Ellis (1994: 243), investigators across the board approve and acknowledge that L2 learning need to be provided with instruction or input. But the approval refers to detrimental factors that may prove to be quite counterproductive such as limited access to L2 outside the L2 classroom, absenteeism, and L2 learners have to be committed students, not occasional users of L2.

How to deliver L2 grammar input

The mere mention of the word 'grammar, the deceptively easy word' might make some, if not all, students tremble and feel awkward, but teaching it effectively in an entertaining way and in context is what matters most. Students' expectation is to learn English without getting lost in a labyrinth of being bombarded by many boring abstract rules of grammar that frustrate, alienate, and put them off the course of learning.

Currently, the teacher's role is to make those rules tangible and understandable by making them discrete; that is, agreeably, pleasingly, and tightly explained to target the plan of a lesson or a drill—for example, the present simple, the present continuous, etc. in a nicely ordered list.

To do this in a fun way. The teacher may choose to ask their students about their ideal idol. Then ask their students what interests them most about their personal icon – the personal life of their idol, their career, achievements, looks, etc. The teacher is making the language accessible for their learners, using authentic language and situation and putting it in context. In other words, a teacher is creating a conducive classroom for a language aspect to be '**learnable'** (in principle). This is a different question from whether a given student *has learnt it' [the emphases are the author's] (James, 1998: 77)*.

Another enticing way of learning is through stories. This is synonymous with all cultures. It is used to bring out the learners' interlanguage grammar skill. Storytelling is a historic, vivid and memorable activity especially when the story is embellished and made colourful. We normally use the past simple tense in recounting events, but we use instead

the historic present tense to make past events relived and to make a dramatic impact on the listener. The story's length may vary depending on the learners' linguistic ability, strength, and stamina. Teachers and learners can tell their stories, thereby creating a jovial classroom full of social and communal feelings mixing message with merry. Some catchphrases for the students may go like, 'Back in the day…', 'Once upon a time…'; 'When I was/ we were…'.

The historic present tense is also used in announcing news bulletins to bring about a sense of urgency. For example, Sanderson (1999:262), in his book Using Newspapers in the Classroom, uses the following example: 'Beatles' **PR** man dies aged 65' [sic]. To generate an instant reaction from the public and to create an atmosphere of sympathy and empathy.

Arab students find it incumbent on themselves to assist and support one another by tribal traditions. They settle their matters cooperatively and collaboratively. This gives rise to the fact that students have the affection to be quite chatty and fluent and are not the seemingly passive recipients, the impression that some teachers might gather. This verbosity, if you like, might cloud accuracy. As such, it becomes the teacher's responsibility to orchestrate the classroom balancing the skills and providing students with a fair share of participation, stressing the concept of accuracy. The primary goal should be to enable students to talk about their own culture and take it as a stepping stone to navigate into L2 culture where will compete to show their intellectual prowess. Thesiger (1959: 97) eloquently writes

> 'All that is best in the Arabs has come from the desert: their deep religious instinct, which has found expression in Islam; their sense of fellowship, which binds them as members of one faith; their pride of race; their generosity and sense of hospitality; their dignity of others as fellow human beings; their humour, their courage and patience, the language they speak and their passionate love of poetry. But the Arabs are a race which produces its best only under conditions of extreme hardship and deteriorates progressively as living conditions become easier'.

Using inductive (which is also referred to as 'bottom up') approach to teaching elicits students' contribution and leads them to a comfortable consequence (students identify grammar rules by working through drills) as it engages them in the activity under discussion and provides them with ample opportunity to think for themselves where they learn by doing that will eventually instil a durable impact in their minds for viable understanding and use. Also, to personally and individually engage learners implies empowering them to process the relevant knowledge imparted on them and improves its future use. Thinking for themselves coupled with engagement should be hand in glove with writing down the example sentences to codify, objectify and concretise their knowledge and enhance their writing skills.

I would not worry much about the criticisms being levelled against this technique of teaching. There is no absolute best theory of teaching. Criticisms are there anyway, anywhere and anytime so long as your tender hearts are receptive and drinking in the input. According to Ellis (1994: 243), investigators across the board approve and acknowledge that L2 learning needs to be provided with input.

Students differing learning styles may present a bit of a problem for the teacher. Some might prefer learning through listening, which involves repeating over and over again. Others may find themselves in reading etc. In such cases it rests with the teacher to decide the teaching approaches they deem suitable.

Delight in difference

The students' varying habits of learning are a greatly appreciated source of feedback for L2 teachers. Diversified learning methods suggest that learners are not analogous or not a carbon copy of one another. Rather, these different ways of learning reveal distinct sociocultural, linguistic, and psychological backgrounds. Put simply, in every productive classroom, each and every learner is characterized by their particular propensities and learning experiences. This uniqueness and individuality are to be seen in a new light for enhancing and retaining learning. This new light shines with the key concept of taking a renewed interest in learners where the invisible learner becomes visible. Diane Larsen Freeman disapproves SLA research that regards learner variability as an unimportant approach. She states that, 'While the learner has not been ignored in second language acquisition (SLA) research, more attention has been paid to characterizing an acquisition process that is common to all learners'(2001:12).

Marrying the models: A conviction of compromise

The purpose of foreign language learning is the proficiency of communicative capability, empowering learners to handle language for communicative purposes in real-life situations. Consequently, this necessitates the combination of grammar and communication It remains to find the appropriate approaches that can be used in L2 classrooms (Nassaji, 1999; Nassaji & Cumming, 2000) and to increase the prospect for a focus on grammar without losing the focus on meaning and communication. In the past decade, a number of studies investigated the success and potency of techniques of amalgamating grammar instruction with setting opportunities for communicative input and output.

Van Patten (2002) sees that designing explicit grammar instruction together with input processing activities will motivate the comprehension of L2 strings of language prior to producing and using it. Such activities are believed to assist learners in establishing a form-meaning association of information culminating in administering and refining grammar for meaning, which he calls Processing Instruction.

Within the framework of Interactional Feedback, Doughty and Varela (1998) studied the role of corrective recasts in response to learners' lexical and grammatical errors. They realized that recasts showed more effect on phonological errors.

Dought and Varela (1998) and Trahey and White (1993) followed a technique, Textual Enhancement, where they made target language features more salient by making those input components more noticeable, using typographic functions such as bold print, capital letters, italics including underlining. It is assumed that conducting such activities repeatedly will increase the subconscious saliency of foreign language elements, which ultimately lead to noticing them.

Meet student desire for L2 grammar input

Throughout my matured and mellowed teaching experience as an L2 English language practitioner for over 25 years in different countries, I have found out that students have always shown keen interest in the teaching of grammar in order to progress and polish their English. This was corroborated by evidence elsewhere. Kaufmann (1993), for instance, gave a questionnaire to teachers and EFL students in Puerto Rico and Turkey. His study involved implicit and explicit L2 grammar input. Kaufman's fundamental finding was that students preferred and 'expected corrections' from teachers (James, 1998, 254). Kaufmann's questionnaire also revealed that 'while teachers preferred to give implicit corrections, students preferred to receive explicit ones' (James, ibid).

Leki (1991b: 207), cited in James (1998: 253), establishes that students preferred to receive teacher feedback on their writing and notes they 'wanted their teachers to show where the error was and to give a clue how to correct it.'
It is this approach that I would unequivocally support simply because the teacher tries to reconstruct what the students are attempting to utter. According to James (1998, 255), reconstruction means 'putting the grammar right- there is form-focus.'

Conclusion

As can be realized, contemporary investigations show that grammar instruction is indispensable for foreign language learners to gain the capability of learning L2 grammar and suggest that, among other things, the crucial requirements for learning L2 grammar are learner noticing, ongoing perception and understanding of L2 structures and space for production and use.

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Review of 12 Quality Audit Reports on Student Learning in GFPS in Oman

Holi Ibrahim Holi Ali, Sergio Saleem Scatolini, Bushra Mubarak Al Hassni, Qasim Salim Al Washahi

Abstract

The study draws on corpus data collected from eight General Foundation Program[1] (GFP) quality audit reports from the Omani Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). The overarching objective of the study was to identify the OAAA's focal points of interest and their importance to guarantee quality in college-preparedness programs and make recommendations for future GFP quality audits. Consequently, this paper attempts (1) to present the main aspects on which the OAAA panels have concentrated during GFP quality audits, (2) to highlight the most salient issues that have been raised in their reports regarding the GFP student learning, and (3) to make some recommendations so that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Oman can both maximize their performance in this area and meet the OAAA's expectations.

Keywords: Analysis; general foundation program (GFP); Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA); quality in higher education, Q.A. reports; student learning; program review; English for Special Purposes (ESP); English for Academic Purposes (EAP)

INTRODUCTION

Omani colleges are currently fully engaged in both institutional and program quality assurance processes. This paper focuses on one aspect of program evaluation, namely "Scope 2: Student learning" of the audit of General Foundation Programs (GFPs) being conducted by the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA).

Context of the study

Higher education is dynamic and has grown rapidly over the past three decades. Oman has developed an independent higher education (HEd) system comprising more than 162 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that award post-secondary certificates, diplomas, and degrees. Although a plethora of research projects have been conducted on the GFP in Oman from various perspectives (e.g. Abdullah, 2017; Al-Busaidi, and Tuzlukova, 2013; Alghenaimi, Al-Saadi, Al-Reesi, 2018; Al-Hajri, 2013; Al-Husseini, 2006; Al-Issa & Al-Mahrooqi, 2017; Alluri, 2018; Al-Maamari, Al-Sabti, 2013; Al-Senaidi, 2020; Al-Siyabi, & Al-Amri, 2016; Al-Siyabi & Tuzlukova, 2015; Baby, 2018; Baporikar, & Shah; 2012; Denman & Al-Mahrooqi, 2018; Gasmi, 2017; Ginosyan, & Tuzlukova, 2017;

[1] We adhere to the American spelling of "program" unless the word is found in a literal citation or the title of a document.

Kashoob, 2018; Lo, Al Aufi, & Cherif, 2018; Ross, & Trevor-Roper, 2015; Thérèse Le Roux, 2015; Thumiki, 2019, Tuzlukova, Inguva, and Sancheti, 2019; Tuzlukova, & Prabhukanth, 2018; Tuzlukova, Inguva, Sancheti, and Bayburtsyan, 2018; Tuzlukova, Ginosyan & Hadra, 2017; Tuzlukova, Al-Busaidi, 2017), only a few of them have focused on the GFP from a quality assurance perspective (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman, Al-Issa, 2015; Carroll, Razv, & Goodliffe, 2009; Baporikar & Shah, 2012; Inguva, 2018; Ross, & Trevor-Roper, 2015). As a result, there is a need for research to be conducted into quality assurance standards, audits, and practices in HEIs in the Sultanate, and this paper seeks to contribute to meeting this need.

Aim of the study

Drawing on recent GFP quality audit reports from the OAAA between 2018 and 2020, this study will (1) present the main aspects on which the OAAA panels have concentrated during GFP quality audits, (2) highlight the most salient issues that have been raised in their reports regarding the GFP student learning, and (3) make some recommendations so that HEIs in Oman can both maximize the performance of their GFPs and meet the OAAA's expectations.

Methodology

Despite the growing importance of program accreditation, very few studies have yet examined the salient issues and challenges associated with GFPs in the Omani context as they are described in the OAAA's GFP audit reports. Therefore, this study analyzes those reports stretching from 2018 to 2020 and identifies the most salient issues raised in them. Data analysis was done manually and is presented according to a priori and emergent themes.

Out of the four scopes of the GFP (Governance and Management, Student Learning, Academic and Student Support Services, and Staff and Staff Support Services), this study focuses only on Scope 2, or Student Learning. This scope includes: GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes, Curriculum, Student Entry and Exist Standards, Teaching Quality, Academic Integrity, Assessment of Student Achievement, Feedback to Student on Assessment, Academic Security and Invigilation, Student Retention and Progression, and Relationships with GFP Alumni (OAAA, 2017). Scope 2 was chosen because the learning process is the ultimate aim of education.

The OAAA GFP audit reports were written by the various OAAA panels to which the audits were entrusted. They include the so-called CARs: commendations (= Well done!), affirmations (= The HEI seems to have started dealing with the problem), and recommendations (= There is still work to be done!). The recommendations are general to give each HEI the freedom to seek out their own solutions to their particular challenges. To simplify the reporting, the HEIs will not be mentioned by name (whoever wishes to consult the official reports on each college can freely access the documents on the OAAA's website: http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Default.aspx).

GENERAL FOUNDATION PROGRAMS (GFPs) IN OMAN

In the Sultanate of Oman, post-secondary school candidate students must complete a GFP before they can be accepted into higher education (Lo, Al Aufi & Cherif, 2018).

However, GFPs, as such, are still a relatively new experience in the GCC states, and the programs often differ in focus, content, status, structure, level, system, and duration.

The GFPs' potential and actual significance stem from their unique transitional function to link secondary and post-secondary education. GFPs have both visible and invisible roles (Al-Husseini, 2006). On the one hand, they prepare students for English-medium HEd while, on the other, they play transitional, integrative, and communicative roles. They minimize the gap between the current skills of school-leavers and those needed in HEd, for example, language, communication and study skills (Tuzlukova & Al-Busaidi, 2017). As Carroll, Razvi, Goodlife, & Al-Habsi (2009) remarked, "the significance of foundation programs in the overall education system is simply too important to ignore" (p. 3).

The history of GFPs in Oman goes back to 2008 when the decision of the Higher Education Council No. 13/2008 prompted the Minister of Higher Education's Ministerial Decision No. 72/2008 mandating the establishment of GFPs in all public and private HEIs in Oman by the start of the 2009-2010 academic year (OAAA, 2008; Baby, 2018; Carroll, Razv & Goodliffe, 2009). At the same time, the Oman Accreditation Council (OAC), later renamed as Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, started a project to establish internationally benchmarked academic standards for the GFPs (Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe and Al Habsi, 2009).

With such programs, many GCC states sought to provide an induction to university life and to ensure a healthy transition from Arabic-medium schooling to English-medium undergraduate study (Tuzlukova & Al-Busaidi, 2017). The GFP can be considered an integral part of almost all of the HEIs in Oman, and it is a "feeder program" for bachelor's programs (Al Hajri, 2014; Thumik, 2019).

There is an increasing awareness of the need to establish and monitor quality assurance mechanisms in various branches of HEd (Al-Mahrooqi, Denman & Al-Issa, 2016), including GFPs. As a result, the OAAA placed GFPs in the Authority Manual under a broad title: "Student Learning by Coursework Programs". HEIs are given the freedom to articulate their objectives in line with the National Standards and to determine the structure of their own GFP, as well as to choose their teaching materials and assessment methods. As expected, this flexibility has resulted in HEIs having different experiences and practices in the area of college-preparatory studies (Kashoob, 2018).

The GFP curriculum includes four mandatory components, namely English, Computer (Literacy), Mathematics, and Study Skills (OAAA, 2008; Abdullah, 2017), and GFP students are generally expected to attain a level of competence in the English language equivalent to IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Band 5.0 (See "Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes" (OAS for GFP), 2008, p. 5). Colleges may add other components to the GFP curriculum wherever necessary (OAAA, 2008), e.g., the GFP at the International College of Engineering and Management (ICEM) includes Science (www.icem.edu.om). In Oman, students should be able to complete the GFP in one to two years, depending on the length of each level (Gasmi, 2017). The study load typically consists of twenty weekly contact hours for English courses and two weekly contact hours for mathematics and/or computer skills

courses each semester (Al Hajri, 2013). However, in most cases, the amount of input depends on students' results in the placement tests in English, Mathematics, and Computer.

Apart from the remedial aims of the GFPs, they are also meant to immerse newcomers in the college environment, its expectations, and the pertinent learning and teaching styles, including the academic register of the language of instruction (Al-Husseini, 2006; Alghenaimi, Al-Saadi & Al Reesi, 2018; Tuzlukova, Inguva, & Sancheti, 2019; Le Roux, 2015; Al-Busaidi1 & Tuzlukova, 2013). Omani high school graduates, similarly to their peers around the world, experience multiple challenges adjusting to the HEd system that can affect their progress in the English-medium academic environment, social and emotional well-being, and confidence and self-esteem (Ginosyan & Tuzlukova, 2016).

Since the GFPs are not part of any degree program, they do not confer the right to formal academic credits, and grades are not included in the students' GPA (Al Senaidi, 2020; Inguva, 2018).

GFP ACCREDITATION IN OMAN

The OAAA is the authority that audits and confers the seal of accreditation to all GFPs. All audit reports are published on the OAAA's website, with only a few exceptions being made (e.g., for military colleges). From the point of view of the HEIs, the ultimate goal of accreditation is to enhance their "brand" and help them in the promotion of their programs (Ross & Trevor-Rope, 2018).

In 2007, a national symposium for foundation programs was convened at Sultan Qaboos University. Additionally, online discussions were conducted on the OAC website (now known as OAAA). Finally, in 2008, the OAS for GFP came to life (Carroll, Razvi & Goodliffe, 2009, p.4; Al-Maamari & Al-Sabti, 2013). Their introduction may be considered a form of state intervention (Levin, 1999) whereby a minimum mandatory degree of uniformity was attempted within a national framework including a list of aims and norms that all GFPs had to meet. Basically, to obtain accreditation, a GFP must be effective in helping students to meet the specified learning outcomes in the four mandatory areas of learning: English Language, Mathematics, Computer, and Study Skills. These areas were selected based on the advice of academic staff in Oman, the international literature, and international benchmarks (Carroll, Razv, & Goodliffe, 2009) such as the Report of the U.K.'s National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (Dearing, 1997).

In the 2009/2010 academic year, the OAC was to commence accreditation of GFPs on a voluntary basis (Carroll, Razvi & Goodliffe, 2009). The introduction of the OAS for GFP highlighted quality enhancement opportunities that were to be shared across the nation and extended far beyond merely modifying curricula (Carroll, Razvi & Goodliffe, 2009). These common OAS for GFP were needed to ensure that all students would be equally and fully prepared to commence their academic studies at an HEI (Al Senaidi, 2020).

As part of the process, the OAAA expects that the HEIs benchmark their GFPs nationally and internationally. However, since most countries do not have GFPs, regional trends and

international level-based proficiency exams or tests may arguably be used for benchmarking purposes. Among the most well-known HEd admission tests are the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of Mathematics for University Admission (TMUA), and the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) in the U.K. or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the USA. The role of benchmarking was highlighted in Goal 5 of the OAAA's Strategic Plan for 2016-2020, which aims to "develop and implement a robust internationally-benchmarked external review process for General Foundation Programs helps to ensure that students are adequately prepared for their higher education studies".

In January 2015, a three-phase approach to the accreditation of GFPs was approved by the OAAA Board. The first phase of it is the GFP Quality Audit. This phase started in February 2017 with the first two HEIs that submitted their GFP Quality Audit Portfolios (http://www.oaaa.gov.om/GFPAccredation.aspx#GeneralFoundation).

Each HEI's GFP Self-Study Report must look into four mandatory areas:

1. Governance and Management
2. GFP Student Learning
3. Academic and Student Support Services
4. Staff and Staff Support Services

The OAAA's Manual, the various reports of the audit panel of experts, and the OAAA final response are also structured in keeping with these four scopes once the process has been completed. The scopes are further elucidated by means of indicators, which are not mandatory items but help the HEIs to paint a comprehensive picture of their systems, mechanisms, and processes following the ADRI (Approach, Deployment, Results, and Improvement) model or another equivalent model for analysis (OAAA, General Foundation Program Quality Audit Manual, 2017, p.23).

CONTESTED SUCCESS OF GFPs

Those who view the GFP as a "bridging program" between school and college could adduce that since a sizeable number of GFP students manage to access their degree programs each year, the current GFPs may be seen as meeting their goals, at least reasonably well. On the other hand, those who view the GFP scheme as a "remedial program" meant to fill the lacunae in the knowledge base and skills repertoire of post-school college candidates contend that the very existence of GFPs is a sign that the different layers of the education system are not in sync. The figures show that almost 80% of Omani high school graduates admitted to HEd need to take English language courses in the GFP (Al-Lamki, 1998). Moreover, the fact that even within the various GFPs, a considerable number of students need the support of additional remedial schemes (remediation to cope with Remediation; Scatolini et al., 2018) and rather "flexible" assessment criteria reinforces the suspicion that "something is not right". However, GFPs cannot address structural gaps in the overall education system but rather provide additional assistance to those students who have been exposed to the required academic standards in school but have not yet succeeded in meeting them (Carroll, Razvi & Goodliffe, 2009). Moreover, since much of this predicament is caused by the fact that English has been made the main language of instruction in HEd in Oman, it would be unfair to disqualify (state-run) schools as "failed institutions" based only on their former

students' need for additional English courses (namely, the GFP).[2] Still, some researchers have pointed out that student variables should also be investigated because the existing communicative teaching methodologies, experienced faculty, satisfactory infrastructure and facilities, free access to education, and governmental allowances for students have not been enough for the students to attain results that are commensurate with the investment in GFPs (Baporikar & Shah, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of the OAAA's Program Accreditation System is to enable national oversight of quality assurance and improvement systems in HEIs, ensuring that these are in place and effective and that their outcomes meet national standards (OAAA, 2019).

OAAA's focal points regarding Scope 2

The following table illustrates the CARs concerning Scope 2 in the twelve OAAA's GFP audit reports stretching from 2018 to 2020.

Table 1: Analysis of the 12 OAAA's GFP Reports Between 2018 and 2020

No	Criteria	Commendations	Affirmations	Recommendations
2.1	GFP Aims and Learning Outcomes	2	3	10
2.2	Curriculum	1	3	8
2.3	Student Entry and Exit Standards	0	5	15
2.4	Teaching Quality	4	4	4
2.5	Academic Integrity,	0	3	4
2.6	Assessment of Student Achievement	1	11	12
2.7	Feedback to Student on Assessment	0	0	1
2.8	Academic Security and Invigilation	2	0	3
2.9	Student Retention and Progression	0	1	5
2.10	Relationships with GFP Alumni	0	4	2
Total		**10**	**34**	**64**

[2] To better understand the situation, research should be conducted comparing the knowledge base and skills of students who start a degree programme in the English medium and those who do likewise in the Arabic medium. Only this type of research can provide the data needed to explain whether the current problems are due to deficiencies in schooling as a whole or merely in English teaching in schools. Beside English, research should also be done into the presence and role of study and critical thinking skills in the school curriculum and their impact on the performance of college students, both in GFP (in English-medium degree programmes) and year one (in English- and Arabic-medium degree programmes). Arabic-medium programmes do not have GFPs.

Worth noting is that there are only 10 commendations across the twelve reports. In fact, the audited HEIs still have a long way to go regarding student entry and exit standards, academic integrity, assessment of student achievement, student retention and progression, and relationships with GFP alumni.

Most of the reports include recommendations (64), and **Student Entry and Exit Standards** seems to be the most salient issue within the report and across the audited HEIs. Here is one of the most frequent CARs:

> "The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with … that the Foundation Programme Exit tests need to be reviewed and benchmarked against external reference points, and supports the actions taken by the Centre for Preparatory Studies to conduct an external benchmarking exercise as a matter of priority" (OAAA'S GFP Reports, 2019, p. 29).

Additionally, the **assessment of student achievement** is also reported as one of the problematic areas in GFP student learning.

Finally, **GFP aims, and learning outcomes** are also deemed to be a serious issue. This suggests that aims are not fully reflected in the GFPs' overall learning outcomes and their design. The GFP outcomes should be aligned to the OAS for GFP, as is clearly articulated in these recommendations:

> "The Oman Academic Accreditation recommends that … incorporate the requirements of all higher education programmes in its General Foundation Programme learning outcomes to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills required for their future higher education studies." (OAAA'S GFP Reports, 2018, p. 18).

> The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that … ensure that all module learning outcomes of the General Foundation Programme are aligned to the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes in order to prepare students for their future higher education studies (OAAA's GFP Reports, 2019, p. 25).

The GFPs also need to use **external reference points,** such as the OAS for GFP, as they articulate their learning outcomes. Here is another frequent observation among the CARs:

> "The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that … establish a process for external benchmarking of its General Foundation Programme standards to ensure that student achievement meets the requirements of the Oman Academic Standards for the General Foundation Programmes." (OAAA's GFP Reports, 2019, p. 25).

The reports focus on the alignment between the aims of the program, the overall and particular learning outcomes, and the actual design at all levels. To avoid making this alignment wholly subjective and guarantee intra-programmatic consistency, the OAAA includes three typical external variables: (1) the **GFP students' future educational needs** (what they need to know to start their degree programs), (2) the **good practices** in

other HEIs (the knowledge of which is gained by benchmarking with them), and (3) **stakeholders' feedback**.

Our reading of the CARs in the reports has confirmed that the OAAA expects GFP modules to be conceived of, developed, and delivered from **an ESP perspective and in light of the OAS, good practices elsewhere, the advice of GFP external examiners, and the feedback of the pertinent stakeholders** (including that of GFP alumni). To do that with regards to English, the level and nature of the required English proficiency for the post-foundation studies must be taken as the criterion. HEIs must also bear in mind that **GFP comprises more than English**. The reports reveal the OAAA's desires that Mathematics be better integrated within the GFP. Moreover, we predict that in light of the Corona crisis, future reports will similarly highlight the need to adjust the IT curriculum so that it can prepare GFP students for remote online teaching and learning.

The reports indicate that the OAAA expects HEIs to use **different updated versions of the GFP placement entry test and tools** to ensure the test's integrity and the validity and accuracy of its results. Appropriate entry and exit assessment procedures must be implemented in all GFP subject areas to establish the program's effectiveness in preparing students for their post-GFP studies. HEIs must equally ensure that these tests are subject to rigorous review to establish test validity and reliability. The GFP placement and proficiency tests need to be reviewed and benchmarked to be used together as a reliable tool to determine the appropriate knowledge and skills of those admitted to the GFP. Furthermore, there is a need for **periodical benchmarking schemes** to guarantee that the GFP entry and exit standards are keeping with recognized international standards.

Apart from the usual points about the curriculum, the reports have highlighted two other aspects of Q.A. in GFPs: (1) **remedial and at-risk learning support** and (2) the need for **proof-reading all in-house materials and documentation** to avoid mistakes, including matters pertaining to the teaching calendar, class contact hours, and examination arrangements.

The reports illustrate the **importance of study skills** as one of the independent components of the GFP.

> "The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority agrees with … that the Study Skills component of the Oman Academic Standards for General Foundation Programmes needs to be fully integrated into the Foundation Programme curriculum, teaching and assessment to ensure that all of the Learning Outcome Standards in this area are achieved, and supports its efforts to develop a separate Study Skills course within the Programme." (OAAA's GFP Reports, 2019, p. 25)

Study skills include both general and specific competencies, but for them to be properly presented and rehearsed in class, they should not be conceived of in isolation of each other, for example, separating language components from study skills.

Generally speaking, the Study Skills curriculum can be delivered in different ways. Davies and Cousin (2002) identified three main approaches to teaching academic literacy

skills to students, namely embedded, integrated, and separate. The *embedded* approach implies that academic literacy skills can be implicitly included in disciplinary subject content (Lea and Street, 1998). The *integrated* approach presupposes that content-subject teachers work together with EAP instructors to improve students' study skills and enable them to cope with their technical specialisms. In this approach, the academic literacy skills are explicitly integrated into the technical and academic content (Davies and Cousin, 2002). The *separate* approach teaches the academic literacy skills in discrete courses or modules (Davies and Cousin, 2002; Drury, Airey, & O'Carroll; 2010; Wingate and Tribble, 2012). Hence, the HEIs need to be clear in their approach to designing, delivering, and assessing Study Skills (as a GFP subject) and/or study skills (as skills) in the GPF.

Finally, the reports attribute considerable importance to the **regular review of the academic advising schemes** for GFP student to ensure their effectiveness.

> "The Oman Academic Accreditation Authority recommends that (…) HEIs regularly review the implementation of its academic advising system for the Foundation Programme students to ensure its effectiveness." (OAAA's GFP Reports, 2019, p. 21)

This last point implies that the HEIs have to actually set up academic advising mechanisms since these are often in place only within degree programs but not in GFPs.

Recommendations

In light of the above findings, we would like to make the following recommendations.

First, the English, Mathematics, IT., and Study Skills GFP components should be more clearly aligned with the students' future educational needs than has been the case so far. As for English, this would point towards English for Special Purposes (ESP) rather than the General English courses that have been commonplace until now. At the same time, colleges must decide how they are going to focus on study skills, whether in a discrete Study Skills component or across the English, Mathematics and IT curricula.

Second, HEIs need to ensure that students who pass the English modules of the GFP have attained the required level in each of the four English language skills (equivalent to IELTS band 5).

Third, the GFP placement and proficiency tests need to be reviewed and benchmarked so that they can be used as a reliable tool to realistically determine the level of the newly admitted GFP students.

Fourthly, HEIs need to develop and implement a systematic approach to the annual review of their GFP. Such a system should set out the official ways of gaining feedback from GFP alumni and external stakeholders about the program and the preparedness level of its graduates. At the same time, it should indicate how the said feedback will be used to ensure that the GFP is effective in fulfilling its aims. Apart from that, the HEIs must review the number of contact hours allocated to their GFP courses and whether these hours are being employed efficiently, effectively, and with the desired impact.

Finally, since the OAAA expects HEIs to offer their GFP students additional remedial and differential learning support, colleges may have to set up academic advising and counselling schemes, which are often in place only for degree students.

CONCLUSIONS

Judging by the OAAA GFP Reports written between 2018 and 2020, we would like to suggest that the different OAAA panels and the OAAA as such have been giving some consistent signals.

- The OAAA expects GFPs to be degree-program specific and oriented. In other words, the English, Mathematics, I.T., and Study Skills components of the GPFs should be aligned with the future educational needs of the students to a much greater degree than has been the case so far.
- The OAAA expects that the HEIs benchmark their GFPs not only nationally but also internationally (which could be read as regionally since most countries do not have GFPs).
- The OAAA expects HEIs to offer their GFP students additional remedial and differential learning support. Moreover, the OAAA expects HEIs to regularly review the implementation of their academic advising system for the GFP students to ensure its effectiveness.
- The OAAA expects HEIs to give study skills the importance and role which the OAS for GFP attributed to them. In other words, these sets of (transferable) skills need to be fully integrated into the curriculum, teaching, and assessment of a Study Skills course or of the other three components if the colleges have opted for integration.
- The OAAA expects HEIs to ensure that all module learning outcomes of their GFPs are aligned to the OAS for GFP.

Due to the small scale of this study, there are some inevitable limitations to the comprehensiveness of this contribution. The study relied exclusively on the reports and focused only on Scope 2. Hence, there is a need for other studies to consider the remaining scopes and use other supporting methods of data collection so that greater insight may be gained. It would also be helpful to have more studies of the salient issues raised in the OAAA GFP reports employing more multifaceted approaches so that both educators and policymakers can better steer their quality assurance endeavors.

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An Orienting Model for Facilitating Constructionist Pedagogies in the Context of ELT in Oman

Abdullah Alhassani

Abstract

Research conducted in the Omani higher education context shows prevalence of didactic, information-delivery and teacher-centric pedagogies in the ELT context, but contrastingly insufficient evidence on constructionist-based learning. While literature abounds in constructivist models, little attention has been given to providing an orienting model and operationalized framework for constructionist learning, particularly in the literature of Papertian constructionism. The paper aims to fill this gap by expounding a model that can facilitate the creation of constructionist learning environments and frame pedagogical enactment. The model covers six areas central to successful facilitation of constructionist learning: 1) creating a suitable context for learning, 2) enabling relevant learning, 3) enabling flexible and iterative learning, 4) enabling active and independent learning, 5) enabling effective learning, and 6) enabling transferable learning. This model was mainly informed by a doctoral research conducted on the case of multimedia authoring in the context of a constructionist learning. This model offers many implications for the design and implementation of constructionist learning and can pave the way for wider integration of constructionist learning into higher education pedagogy.

Keywords: ELT context, constructionist-based learning, higher education, pedagogy

Introduction

Our pedagogical practices and choices are often driven by our deeply rooted convictions regarding knowledge (i.e. epistemic beliefs) and the world (i.e. ontological beliefs), and the process by which one comes to develop an understanding about both (Ackermann, 2004). At one end of the extreme sit some prevalent practices which advocate propositional and conceptual knowledge and are therefore dominated by transmission-based approaches to instruction. In such models, knowledge is viewed as a commodity that can be passed on to learners, whose primary role is to process and digest established knowledge claims. The teacher's role is quite prominent in this model, and learning is often teacher centric.

The other end of the extreme, by contrast, shows primacy of free exploration and open-ended inquiry freed to a great extent from structural impositions and teacher domination. In such models, knowledge is viewed as constructed, co-constructed and interpreted by individuals and/or groups based on their subjective experiences in the world. The teacher's role is less prominent in this model, often limited to facilitation of the learning process and experience by introducing and planting constructive elements (Papert, 1980).

This paper subscribes to the second camp. Papertian constructionism builds on Piaget's constructivist theory and shares the view that people construct their own knowledge and interpretation of the world through active experiencing and negotiating meaning with others (Ackermann, 2001). This fundamental premise of knowledge construction sits at

odds with conventional pedagogies that operate on the basis of knowledge transmission, advocating instead a more learner-centric approach to concrete and applied learning that culminates in external artefacts, preferably through the mediation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (Papert, 1987, 1980).

Aim

While Papert's theory has been influential in many fields of study (e.g. mathematics, robotics), it remains of marginal relevance to the English Language Teaching (ELT) field. The theory makes substantial claims about learning design, processes, and outcomes, which are informed by Papert's constructivist ideals and progressive views about education. Yet considering the breadth and scope of the theory, it seems to lack an orienting model that can ease its adoption into pedagogical practice. Constructivist models abound, but not ones closely aligned with Papert's constructionist approach.

Based on this limitation of Papert's theory, this paper attempts to offer an orienting model for Papertian constructionism to facilitate its uptake into pedagogical design and practice. This proposed model is grounded in the wide gap in local Omani literature regarding introducing constructionist models that inform higher education (HE) pedagogy.

This gap provides the impetus for this research, which expounds six design elements which culminate in a model that frames the design and enactment of constructionist learning in the ELT context in Oman. These enabling elements comprise the following: 1) creating a suitable context for learning, 2) enabling relevant learning, 3) enabling flexible and iterative learning, 4) enabling active and independent learning, 5) enabling effective learning, and 6) enabling transferable learning.

Background

Examining the Local ELT Context

Local Omani literature (e.g. Al-Badwawi, 2011; Al-Hajri, 2013; Al-Issa, 2011, 2005) suggests the ELT context in Omani HE is largely dominated by didactics, informational and theoretical knowledge, knowledge reproduction, and teaching for the test. The pedagogical premises of these practices reinforce the cognitivist philosophies of knowledge construction, which view the brain as a vehicle for processing and storing knowledge. Often, this gives prominence to acquisition-based learning and teacher-centric pedagogies (Sfard, 1998). Pre-established knowledge claims often receive primacy over personal approaches and strategies to meaning making.

The problems with conventional practice indicate a mismatch between employability demands in skillset and HE graduate outcomes. Evidence (e.g. Graduate Survey Department, 2015, 2016) suggests current pedagogies are partly failing to prepare students for the changing employment demands, showing that graduates lack key employability skills (including English language competence, stress management, communication and social skills, motivation, commitment, autonomy and time management). This is why educational policy framings in Oman (e.g. Education Council, 2017) emphasize the significance of facilitating a shift towards constructivist approaches to learning in order to bridge gaps in skills and knowledge between the HE and employment sectors.

This shift, however, requires implementation of the constructivist philosophies and approaches to the design of learning environments and facilitation of constructive learning experiences. This is where Papertian constructionism offers a fit.

Papertian Constructionism: What Does It Have to Offer?

Papert's theory of constructionism is an off-shoot of Piaget's theory of constructivism, and posits knowledge as constructed by individuals and groups in negotiation with the surrounding environment and its endless supply of resources, tools, events, schemas and people (Hoban et al., 2010; Kafai, 2005; Papert, 1980). It differs, however, in its view of knowledge construction. Where Piaget views this as a rational process of meaning-making (Ackermann, 2004), Papert emphasizes the significance of externalizing learning in the form of shareable (material or conceptual) artefacts to supplement and represent meaning-making in the head (Papert, 1996, 1986, 1980; Stager, 2005).

Papert seeks to emphasize the role of social context in manifesting not only thinking and learning processes but also affording contextualization to meaning-making processes, especially between concepts and their referents in the surrounding environment (Harel & Papert, 1990). As such, Papert's approach to learning seems to be both pragmatic and situative (Ackermann, 2001).

Above all, Papertian constructionism offers an overarching view of learning, inclusive of the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological perspectives framing constructionist learning design and enactment. Papert establishes the hallmark for his progressive educational views by critiquing mainstream schooling and the ways it enculturates established ways of knowing and so detaches learning from actual contexts of use (2000, 1980). These progressive views strive to reconcile the rift between formal and informal learning and in-school and outside-school learning. They also establish the basis for Papert's advocacy for an alternative vision, theory and methodology for learning that revolves around the mediation of ICTs (Papert, 1987). Most of Papert's work established the mediation of ICTs in aiding and extending the scope of thinking and learning processes (Harel & Papert, 1990; Papert, 1980).

Papert's work with the constructionist learning lab (CLL) for at-risk teenagers reflected a heuristic approach to the design of learning environments and provided an embodiment of much of his thinking of constructionist learning. The aim of this constructive learning environment was to provide "…a set of experiences that would lead students to construct knowledge through the act of engaging in long-term personally meaningful project work" (Stager, 2005: 3)". Eight guiding principles underpinned the design of CLL: 1) learning by doing, 2) technology as a building material, 3) hard fun, 4) learning to learn, 5) taking time, 6) freedom to get things wrong, 7) do unto ourselves what we do unto our students, and 8) a digital world (Papert, 1999). These principles provided the rationale for pedagogical enactment in CLL.

On these grounds, Papert's theory seems to offer useful outcomes and implications regarding linking theoretical with practical and applied learning, in-school with outside-school learning, and classroom learning with real-life learning. All of these factors are congruent with the educational and reform directions in Oman and thus offer practical applications to the Omani ELT context by enabling constructivist-constructionist learning approaches.

Methodology

In-depth semi-structured interviews were utilized to elicit participant experiences, views, and perspectives regarding student-generated podcasting as a constructionist approach to learning. The inquiry was framed within a Papertian constructionist context which served as a theoretical and conceptual framework for data collection, analysis, and discussion.

The participants consisted of three academics and nineteen students, all of whom with prior relevant experience in podcasting. Both male (n = 8) and female (n = 14) participants were recruited in the study and were interviewed individually. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher.

And inductive-deductive approach to analysis was adopted. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the process included pattern matching and collating similar codes into unified themes. Higher order abstraction was then applied, followed by identifying overarching thematic categories. The process was iterative, and subsequent phases included identifying redundancies as well as code and theme reductions. The final thematic categories correspond to the enabling framework outlined below.

An Enabling Model for Constructionist Learning in ELT in Oman

The model that emerged from study findings consists of six areas, explicated in detail below:

1. Creating a suitable context for learning:

The first design element stipulates the creation of conditions necessary to satisfy and sustain more successful and productive constructionist learning experiences. Overarching design principles are emphasized here. These include, firstly, ensuring the compatibility of curricula, pedagogical approaches, and assessment schemes to the nature of constructionist learning. Parallel to Papert's CLL project, constructionist learning necessitates more flexible curricula within the structure and pacing of learning. The open-ended and iterative nature of constructionist learning necessitates more ill-defined, open-ended, and learner-centric approaches to learning where learners assume both the responsibility and the direction of their own learning. The same applies to assessment schemes, suggesting that conventional test-based learning is ill-suited to the nature of constructionist learning. Project-based assessment would be more suitable in this context. This suggests a need to rethink pedagogical design and enactment and setting them in line with demands of the constructionist approach.

Secondly, there is a need to create the physical environment conducive to constructionist learning. Learners require ample interaction with and manipulation of tools from the surrounding environment, since free exploration and experimentation are central to the constructionist approach and establish the context of meaning-making. (Papert, 1993).

The same can be said about providing a supportive and safe environment to facilitate productive inquiry. Unlike conventional pedagogies which prioritizes precision, the constructionist approach encourages learning through trial and error, persisting in problem solving and learning from mistakes. Students should not be overwhelmed by the need to be right all the time but by the need to advance successfully to their end goals.

This stipulates learner persistence, encouragement, support and an intellectually and emotionally supportive environment, which lends to the next point.

Teacher facilitation, rather than instruction, should define the nature of constructionist learning experiences. Study findings revealed that a lack of relevant prior experiences contributed negatively to the process and increased students' anxiety, sense of loss of direction, and frustration with learning. This is especially relevant in a context that enculturates didactics, and therefore diminishes the amount of self-direction, self-management, and self-responsibility over learning. As a result, teacher facilitation is crucial in helping initiate learners and supporting them to deal with the arduous nature of open-ended projects. Intellectual, emotional, and material forms of support are significant for helping learners succeed by the use of strategies such as scaffolding, directing, probing, and challenging them throughout the learning process to achieve more sophisticated outcomes (see also Stager, 2005, 2001).

2. Enabling relevant learning:

Relevance of learning in the context of the study refers to its congruence with personal needs, current pedagogical practice, and real-world practice. A major finding of the study was that the approach and the skills gained from the multimedia authoring experience seemed to complement personal learner styles. Personal relevance and personal identification with learning both seem to play a role in the degree of investment in the task and appreciation of its future value (Papert, 1980). Literature indicates the changing landscape of learning has been partly triggered by the changes in learner demands, which as a result have pushed many HE institutions to adapt their programmes and align them with learner expectations (Dale & Povey, 2009). Adopting learner-centred approaches has been one way of adaptation, with learners demanding more self-satisfying experiences and employable skills (ibid.). In other words, learning that is relevant to students' needs enhances their motivation and engagement in learning.

Findings also advocate the relevance of knowledge and skillset cultivated by multimedia authoring experiences to contemporary and global pedagogical practice. Students in the context of the study indicated feeling less privileged in this regard, suggesting the pedagogical schemes in place do not match global educational trends. This is not surprising, considering the hold of conventional forms of instruction. Findings also suggest students crave more learner-centric and project-based learning, which contrasts with the commonplace of conventional teacher-centric and test-based approaches (e.g. Dale & Povey, 2009).

A key aspect of relevance concerns the concurrence between the knowledge and skills associated with multimedia authoring with contemporary real-world practices. Establishing such relevance enhances the meaningfulness and applicability of learning to immediate contexts beyond the classroom. Often, the link between classroom practice and real-world practice is missing, which contributes to the decontextualization of learning practices often encountered in formal education. This can be seen in such aspects as prioritizing abstract learning and separating it from actual contexts of use. The problem with this, according to Herrington and Oliver (2000), is that abstract knowledge is "irretrievable in real-life, problem-solving contexts because … [it] ignores the interdependence of situation and cognition" (p. 1). It is to this separation that Papert's

constructionist approach aimed to make one of its greatest contributions, that is, to bridge classroom learning with real-world situations (see Ackermann, 2001).

3. Enabling flexible and iterative learning:

The third design principle necessitates the creation of environments conducive to learning, rather than instruction. A primary finding suggests learning should be regarded as an emergent activity characterized by flexibility and iteration (Papert, 2000, 1980). Constructionist approaches advocate an open-ended and exploratory process of knowledge-building and refinement (Papert, 1980, 1971; Stager, 2001). As such, learners should engage in projects that lead to identifiable goals, but the approach to achieving these goals is not linear. Depending on learner readiness and pace, the frequency of iteration among learners is likely to differ. The key factor is that teachers oversee the successful progression towards goals, often through providing scaffolding, support and feedback.

Furthermore, study findings suggest constructionist projects lend to discovery learning through allowing learners to acquire new knowledge, fill knowledge gaps, and get exposure to myriad tools and learning strategies. The conventional approaches of teacher coercion do little in affording newer grounds for meaning making, unlike engaging in non-linear and open-ended projects. This is because teacher-centric approaches are premeditated towards selective knowledge whereas constructionist learning is less structured as it advocates more learner direction, choice, and autonomy. This entails a more active role from the part of educators in ensuring learners stay on task and providing them with constructive elements that can facilitate more productive experiences.

Another significant aspect relates to how the ill-structured nature of constructionist learning is likely to expose learners to issues and engage them in problem solving. This corroborates the trial-and-error basis of constructionist learning, which suggests that making mistakes is both an inherent and constructive aspect of learning. In the context of programing with Logo, for instance, Papert invested in the process of debugging as key to learning how programming works. This is because students study the bugs, analyze them, and learn to rectify them, instead of ignoring them altogether (Papert, 1980). In doing so, they not only engage deeply with the subject matter, but they also engage in critical thinking, as highlighted below.

Critical thinking is central to the model, suggesting that engaging learners in constructionist projects enables their capacity to think critically and evaluate their learning. This is reiterated in many studies (e.g. Beynon, 2016; Frydenberg, 2008; Pitler et al., 2007), which commend the role of ICTs for enabling critical thinking. The present study confirmed these findings. It revealed that multimedia authoring enabled learners to identify issues on their own and they persevered to find solutions for them. They did not wait for teacher direction but instead attempted to deal on their own with issues that arose. This suggests that, as part of designing for constructionist learning, educators need to enable learners to persevere to find solutions to issues they encounter by considering different alternatives, perspectives, and approaches in problem solving.

An interesting finding suggests that constructionist approaches enable personalized approaches and strategies. This reinforces the earlier point about how constructionist learning appeals to learner styles and preferences (see also Stager, 2001). In deploying

their own thinking and working styles, learners tend to utilize their own preferred strategies for working. The flexibility afforded by the task was found suitable to most students. This is not to say that a few learners found it challenging to exclude expert direction and do everything independently. This was especially distressing for some, who cited concerns for final marks as a major inhibitor for trusting their own strategies.

4. Enabling active and independent learning:

Another significant design principle includes enabling active and autonomous learning. This, firstly, comprises encouraging learner accountability and responsibility. Constructionist approaches capitalize on agentic participation in overseeing the learning process and steering it to maintain goal achievement. A constructive aspect of design sees to the creation of the conditions that enable learners to assume ownership of their own learning (see Kafai, 2005), as this puts learners in the center of the learning process and encourages them to exercise self-choice, rethink their strategies, and find their voice (Resnick & Rosenbaum, 2013).

Self-regulation of learning is also advanced by findings as another key element in constructionist learning design, suggesting self-management and direction of the task contribute to more meaningful and personally rewarding learning experiences. Findings revealed that, throughout the different phases of production, learners worked actively in steering and then reflecting on the different aspects of the process. While this presented challenges to some students due to the novelty of the approach and its perceived risk regarding grading, many appreciated the learner-centric nature of the task as it allowed them to apply their own thinking, ideas, and preferences. Relevant literature (e.g. Forbes, 2015; McLoughlin et al., 2006) corroborates these findings.

5. Enabling effective learning:

Planning for effective learning is a major design principle perpetuated by the model. Study findings suggest some main tenets towards achieving more quality and effective learning, including promoting enhanced learning, applied learning, motivational growth, creativity, and capacity building. This design element becomes of utmost significance to educational policy and practice since it mirrors the essence of educational policy goals and objectives. It also remains a concern for achieving quality education, especially when benchmarked against the demands of the labour market.

A crucial element advanced by findings suggests constructionist projects contribute towards enhanced learning. Through engaging in an iterative process of sense-making, students came to develop wider and deeper knowledge of the subject matter, which culminated in more memorable learning than that experienced in a conventional information-delivery approach. They also gained both knowledge and technical skill of the tools they used, owing to the multiple sources they consulted during knowledge-building accompanied by the heavy exposure to mediating tools throughout the construction process. Many studies (e.g. Dale & Povey, 2009; Lazzari, 2009; Papert, 1980) corroborate these findings.

Furthermore, constructionist learning has been found to develop motivational growth, such as in relation to enhancing learner enthusiasm, interest, enjoyment, and empowerment. This is not to deny that this approach increased some students' anxiety and sense of loss, but these negative reactions were found to subside over time as they gained more familiarity with the constructionist approach and developed more self-confidence. The approach offered many learners the opportunity to feel accomplished, which was accompanied by the realization they could do much more. These breakthroughs are truly powerful in contexts where learners feel deprived of more relevant and satisfying learning.

The same can be said about ways in which constructionist learning promotes creative thinking and creative expression. When learners construct a public artefact, findings indicate deliberate effort was put in producing outcomes that stand out. Some individuals dedicated additional effort in refining their final products to ensure the best result possible, which overcame their concerns for grades. They saw themselves in the products and wanted these products to reflect their passion.

Above all, constructionist learning is geared towards building learner capacity and competency which have been found to be transferable to immediate and future contexts. This is especially useful in the context of graduate outcomes since evidence indicates HE graduate competencies fall short of those demanded by employers (Graduate Survey Department, 2015, 2016). The conventional schemes in formal education seem to underestimate the emphasis on mastery learning and capacity building.

6. Enabling transferable learning:

A final design principle suggests the need to ensure transferability of learning to future learning and wider contexts. Transferability of HE learning (i.e. knowledge and skills) in the context of didactics can be questioned. Judging on the views of local employers, HE graduates were found to lack key employable skills, e.g. English language, stress management, communication skills, motivation, commitment, autonomy, time-management, among others (see Graduate Survey Department, 2016). This suggests pedagogical schemes in HE are partly failing to prepare graduates with to meet the demands of employment.

While didactics have limited affordances for establishing grounds for transferability, constructionist learning seems more able to do so. In addition to engendering personal learning styles and preferences, constructionist learning advocates engaging learners in learning that is personally relevant and meaningful (Kafai & Resnick, 1996; Papert, 1986). The present study findings seem to reinforce this idea, indicating that the technical and technological knowledge and skills gained from the multimedia authoring experience were imparted to extracurricular activities. Moreover, many students had plans to integrate these activities in personal projects and in their future employment. This suggests that when designing for constructionist learning, it is best that the knowledge and skills have the potential for transferability as this is more likely to extend the value of the learning to an individuals' academic, personal, and professional life.

Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

The paper proposed a research-informed model for framing and enacting constructionist learning in the Omani ELT context, as informed by qualitative research conducted in a public HE context. Given the paucity of research on constructionist learning in the Omani HE context, this model helps provide an orienting framework for planning, designing and implementing constructionist learning grounded in multimedia authoring practices.

The model introduces six key design principles, which offer guidelines regarding constructionist learning design and the considerations that should go into the thinking before as well as throughout its enactment. These design principles cover essential aspects related to 1) creating the necessary conditions for successful enactment of constructionist learning (e.g. compatibility of assessment and instructional approaches; providing physical, psychological, cultural and material support; teacher facilitation), 2) relevancy of learning (e.g. personal, pedagogical and real-world relevance), 3) the approach to student learning (e.g. ill-defined and open-ended learning marked by iterative cycles of learning and re-learning), 4) the nature of learner participation (e.g. learner-directed and regulated; learning ownership and accountability), 5) attention to learning effectiveness (e.g. enhanced outcomes; motivation and creativity; building competencies and promoting praxis), and finally, (6) considering learning transferability (e.g. transferable to future learning and wider contexts).

The design principles perpetuated by the model find backing in theory and relevant literature, and this enhances their trustworthiness in addition to their contextual relevance. Papert's work is especially useful, as it provides an overarching view of the philosophical, epistemological, and methodological grounds that inform constructionist approaches to learning. His progressive views, as well as his work with Logo and the CLL provide a provocative rationale for facilitating constructivist-constructionist pedagogies. Evaluating these perspectives can be illuminating to justify the need to introduce constructionist learning in the Omani context given its range of affordances and advantages compared to conventional pedagogies. They could also encourage an inclusive perspective for the rationale for constructionist learning and its suitability to different streams and programs of study within Omani HE.

These design principles have many implications for HE policy and practice. Most notably, the different design principles seem congruent with the educational reform agenda, which are concerned with promoting constructivist pedagogies, learner-centric approaches, enhancing learning accountability and ownership, promoting higher order skills, promoting life-long learning, promoting ICT-mediated learning, among others (Education Council, 2017). These alignment grounds certainly appeal to policy makers, educational leaders, professionals, and educators. While they provide a lead into integrating constructivist pedagogies, they become especially relevant in nurturing learner autonomy, creative learning, and enhancing learner motivation. Study findings corroborate this, as they have revealed aspects of learner empowerment which conventional pedagogical approaches fail to address. These findings proved quite enlightening in the context of the study and showed ways in which learning was deliberately put into immediate use, such as imparting it to both academic and non-academic contexts. Coupled with the excitement for adopting the approach, the novelty of constructionist learning, particularly in ELT, has been found to have direct influence on nurturing the different language skills and enhancing linguistic competence.

In conclusion, considering the paucity of research on constructionist pedagogies in the context of ELT, the model advanced by the present paper helps provide an orienting framework for the design and implementation of constructionist pedagogies. It advances multimedia authoring as an approach to learning, as well as helps pave the way for wider integration of constructionist learning into higher education pedagogy

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Hooked or Not? If Not, Better Late than Never

Irene Simon, Dhanya Pradeep

Abstract

One of the lingering problems in most of the students is the low comprehension level that has to be addressed at the earliest. Researches reveal that the reading habits in the students have to be developed to combat with the problem. Apparently, the students' deviation to other sources of entertainment has led to the deterioration in the reading habit. Albeit, the educators who are aware of the link between pleasure reading and academic performance are limited by the curriculum and the assessment patterns. Since there is a need for a competitive alternative to instil in students the reading habit, this article illustrates the fact that reading has evolved in multiple forms and the manner it can be utilised to bring out the desired result.

Keywords: Reading, Reading Habits, Reading Strategies

I. READING- A JOURNEY FOR LIFE

"Reading maketh a full man."-Francis Bacon

The quote from Francis Bacon magnificently captures the entire essence of the importance of reading in one's life. It's fair to say that we become a complete person because it opens up a whole host of avenues to explore at our fingertips, whether it's a book, a novel, a magazine or an online medium. This gives our imagination wings, and helps us to dream and think in ways that we would not have understood. This helps us to look at the universe and things from a broader perspective and be accustomed to all the happenings around us. It trains our minds how to focus properly and thereby helps in developing concentration. It provides a sense of belonging and a ray of hope. The students' physical skills, cognitive ability and emotions must all function together as they learn. The value of reading is evident and so it is our primary duty to develop this practice in the next generation. Nevertheless, our work has become simple with the increasing technological developments, as it has opened up a whole new world to explore.

II. EVOLUTION OF READING

It is true that new ways of reading have arisen, but reading in the narrow sense, that is, written texts, has undergone major changes and digital screen devices such as smartphones, tablets such as iPads and e-readers such as Kindle have taken their place. It has profoundly affected the reading and literacy practices in pre-schools and kindergartens as well as in elementary schools and higher education, as digital reading is the key reading substrate.

It is also obvious that digital learning environments replace educational books which have created entire iPad schools in many countries, and it is also believed that children may no longer learn how to write by hand because of the ubiquity of keyboards (Merchant, 2015)].

However, there is no possible loss in reading and literacy skills allegedly triggered by digitisation and the modern reading patterns that have taken on text reading (1). The point is not that students spend less time reading, but that they read so differently and that vigorous book reading activities are replaced by shallower types apparently.
Griswold and Wright (2004) exposed such a positive co-relationship between Internet Use and reading and reflected on the double profit of Internet-using readers:

People who exhibit the more–more pattern, reading a lot and using the Internet a lot, are doubly advantaged. They possess information, social connections, and cultural capital, and they know how to get more when they need them .The Internet is not going to displace reading but it is going to give readers yet one more advantage(2).

Indeed, the latest shift from paper to screen encourages us to rethink a range of basic questions such as, Does the change impact cognitive outcomes such as recall and understanding? (Ackerman and Goldsmith, 2011). Why does knowledge understanding change with changes in reading content, for example, from knowing how to read from paper-based texts to knowing how to use the ever-changing hardware and software configurations involved in screen-based reading?

Although the modalities vary, the digital age just ignites a greater understanding of the importance of textuality. Text reading has remained essential even in the various means of reading, especially in the field of education. While the nature of our reading habits is evolving, textual reading will continue to be a significant edifying practice for the readers as text has peculiar strengths that make it distinct from many other forms of communication and it is the lingua franca of modalities (Liu, 2005.]. Given the incremental move towards digitisation, reading and writing remain essential for school education, as well as for the dissemination of informal and realistic information. It is clear, given the significance of reading, that any changes induced by the digitisation of reading are likely to have considerable cognitive, cultural and social implications.

Nevertheless, there has never been enough knowledge of the cultural and social sense of reading. Awareness became the standard for productive social participation at the turn of the 20th century and reading was understood to be important in the sense that it allows for participation in a literate society. Nonetheless, the importance of reading to the contemporary community must be stressed and this involves a clearer understanding of what reading is and does to the individual reader's cognitive abilities, as well as how reading and improvements in reading practice impact our role as a community.

III. THE EFFECTS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON READING

While the perusing of students has developed from printed to computerized gadgets, it has raised the worry of the instructors that if the adjustments in perusing practice has given path for quality perusing, because of whichconcern we are constrained to investigate the positive and negative impacts of advanced perusing.

3.1 Positive impacts of digital reading

Easy accessibility: It can be easily accessed through the website and some of them can be downloaded without the fear of intellectual copyright violations.

Environment friendly: Trees are not cut to make e-content, unlike paper, therefore, they do not cause harm to the environment.

Cost effective: It doesn't cost much to create E-content as they exist in the virtual world.

Capacity: The capacity limit of the device can be expanded to store a great many eBooks.

Versatility: Thousands of eBooks can be stored on a tablet and carried alongside with ease while travelling. They are available at anyplace on the planet at the click of a button.

Simple to utilize: Navigation of e-content is simple as one can in a split-second hop to any page as indicated by their decision.

Boon for the elders and disabled: According to the convenience of the elders and the differently abled it is possible to resize the font of the e-content on the computer and also download software that would turn E-Books into audio versions.

Comfort is significant: Youngsters invest a great deal of energy on their gadgets outside school and it very well may be no terrible thing to offer them the chance to peruse on them. Many school-arranged digital books might be gotten to both online and offline, by means of an application, permitting students to 'acquire' from the schools computerized library and read from anyplace and at any time. Some school custodians might notice some surprising advantages to incorporating some digital books in the library. For instance, in schools with constrained space, digital books permit the library to extend past its physical rack limit; they additionally expel the need to pursue up returns of 'printed copies' of books – a digital book's credit period closes consequently – and computerized titles don't experience the ill effects of physical mileage.

3.2 Negative effects of digital reading

As a coin has two sides, the advancement of computerized perusing too has some negative outcomes as follows

Absence of security: The organization selling E-content may record their perusing history and utilize the explanations for promoting purposes. It intrudes the protection and the scholarly opportunity of the readers.

Loss of genuine feel: Nothing can be compared with the holding and perusing of the old-style book and getting its vibe.

Hard to think: The readers who are used to easy-going advanced perusing on the web think that it's hard to peruse computerized text as similarly as they read materials imprinted on paper.

Low retention level: It is supposed that increased amount of mental energy is required in screen reading and therefore, it results in low retention level (Mangen, et al. 2013). Not only that, continuous exposure to the gadget screen may raise health issues too.

At the point when we think about the sufficient number of advantages in computerized perusing, the negative effects get unimportant. By and by, it cannot be disregarded.

Among the inadequacies, the readers' difficulty to scrutinize modernized content and supposedly low retention level must be paid attention to, as it would influence their perception level and, thereby, lessen their comprehension and retention levels. So how might we have effective utilization of innovation to profit proficiency?

The educators' interests have gotten confounded as advanced perusing would continue and educators have an obligation to furnish students to connect with computerized messages in useful manners (Coiro. and Dobler 2007). These days, many state tests are managed on PCs and this adds another purpose behind educators to show advanced understanding procedures.

It is the educators' need to figure out how to follow the regular great understanding techniques, yet attempt to feature rehearsing them in the computerized space that can make input simpler and help students to go further in their reasoning (Mangen, et al. 2013).

The objective in practically all the methodologies is to slow down the readers off with the goal that they are concentrating on the content.

IV. READING DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Based on a survey conducted among Indian students, the educator's emphasis should be on improving three essential components in reading: competency, comprehension, and motivation. As these three works together, it helps to produce educated, lifelong readers.

4.1 Expertise

The reading starts with visual word processing. Competence in reading influences the other two elements directly: comprehension and motivation. Therefore, we will concentrate on two things in order to improve students' reading skills:

a. Right text
b. Reading goals

The readers should be familiar with correct text, relevant to their age and interests. Since the founding years, vocabulary development should be given due importance. The better the vocabulary, the faster the reader would be able to finish reading. Specific reading methods can be put into practice, such as scanning, skimming etc (Dyson and Haselgrove,

2000). The schools must create a concrete action plan to ensure smooth progress. To keep the readers motivated to read more and more, realistic read goals have to be set.

4.2 Comprehension

Reading is the act of understanding what you are reading. It is known as the level of a text/message comprehension. There are two elements which make up the reading comprehension process: knowledge of vocabulary and understanding of text. Educators will develop reading lessons to help students learn analytical, visual, and communication skills. As stated earlier, the educators must make it easier for the students to possess these skills in digital reading which has become the hour's requirement. How are they going to use technology for better reading?

4.2.a Reading Strategies for the Digital Age

'Headings and Highlight' strategy

In this methodology, the students have a selection of a troublesome article open in Google Docs. In the first place, the educator requests that students read through all alone and feature words they don't have a clue. This is fundamental disentangling work.

After everybody is in the same spot with the jargon, instructors can solicit sets from students to peruse a passage together and feature key thoughts. As they do this, they'll need to examine why they accept those parts are significant. After they have a couple of moments to do this action, the educator can ask them to separately devise a four-word heading for that part of the content dependent on the principle thoughts they've featured. They can type their heading into the Google Doc and afterward look at the headings each made. In the event, if they concocted something other than what's expected, they need to legitimize that theirs is better. By and by, students need to safeguard their reasoning utilizing text.

The educator would then be able to request all the settled upon headings and pair various gatherings together with the goal that four students need to examine their headings and come to agreement on the absolute best portrayal of the fundamental thoughts. Toward the end, the educator may have bunches present or even have the entire class vote on their preferred heading. What's more, exclusively students can think about the procedure they experienced, how the heading encourages them comprehend the perusing, and how it causes them to answer the driving inquiry of the unit.

This technique should effortlessly be possible with paper and pencil. The main genuine affordance of the innovation is the capacity to change the heading on numerous occasions in a perfect manner. Be that as it may, it causes instructors perceive how to bring exchange and conversation into the study hall. At the point when students practice this strategy, they may begin searching for the primary thought in each passage as they read.

Regularly children will peruse a whole passage, see all the words in it, yet never delayed down to make significance or search for primary thoughts. This essential perusing technique compels them to do as such. When they can distinguish the fundamental thought, the following assignment is to comprehend the progression of the thoughts and to interface ideas.

The "Record Layout" apparatus in Google Docs can be a simple and successful approach to request that students choose proof that bolsters the fundamental thoughts they've found. At the point when this instrument is turned on, they can compose a heading for the section and select "Heading 1" starting from the drop menu. At the point when they go over a sentence or expression that speaks to prove supporting that fundamental thought, they sum it up and mark it "Heading 2."

In the interim, at the edge of the Google Doc a blueprint will naturally populate with fundamental thoughts in Heading 1 and supporting proof settled underneath in Heading 2. Toward the end, the entire article is laid out and can be "sent out to chapter by chapter guide," which will put it at the head of the archive, where it very well may be utilized as a hopping off point for composing.

The innovation didn't do any of the speculation for the students, however for this situation the product helped fabricate a layout as they examine and winnow down their proof, and their work has been advantageously spared in a simple to-survey way. That makes starting composition - frequently hard for students - a lot simpler. Furthermore, the headings in the framework naturally jump to the piece of the content where understudies embedded that heading. Thus, a functioning archive is made.

When an instructor sees a framework like this one can without much of a stretch tell if the student has comprehended the perusing. To make this framework, students need to understand the content; deciphering isn't sufficient.

Highlighting Strategy

Instructors once in a while attempt to arrange students by having them feature various ideas in various hues, yet the content can wind up very chaotic and difficult to peruse after such featuring.

Google Doc add-on device lets clients make individualized highlighters in various hues. In this way, for instance, all the content that underpins "Contention #1" may be in red, while the proof in "Contention #2" may be in green, etc. The features can be traded by shading, which makes a table with all the thoughts. The students at that point add another section to the highlighter table, where they can compose synopses of everything in that featured class.

It causes them perceive between various things, and besides, they are requested to sum up what they've done and to that gives great reflection and combination of the data they

have selected. Since certain children experience issues organizing what to feature, an instructor could constrain the quantity of things for each shading.

For this situation, the featuring procedure is made a lot simpler and increasingly powerful in light of the fact that it is advanced. The different hues are marked so the student needn't bother with a key to decode features and all the data can be sent out in one table, instead of filtering back through the whole article.

The huge numbers of these techniques should initially be shown utilizing a book that is definitely not a troublesome intellectual lift for students so that they can gain proficiency with the understanding system and the computerized instruments without additionally perplexing their way through a troublesome book (Gil-Flores, et al. 2012). Another tech apparatus and another learning challenge simultaneously are a formula for disappointment.

Albeit a large number of these procedures should be possible on paper, but utilizing Google Docs is in light of the fact that the frameworks and explanations students make during class can without much of a stretch become their notes.

All these advanced perusing devices must be utilized inside the setting of greater, fascinating inquiries, or, in all likelihood the procedures simply become a rundown of steps.

While Socratic classes can take a lot of preparation, students are identifying fundamental thoughts, sorting out facts and featuring substantial parts in administering an argument they care about, which makes the whole process increasingly relevant.

A few investigations consider the decline in interest on advanced technology to be more due to network interruptions than to the medium itself. Perhaps patience is one of the main skills in encouraging students expected to slowly peruse on the internet.

3.3 Motivation

Collection of e-content plays a critical role, as it has to stimulate the curiosity of readers to dive deeper into it. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the facilitator to guide the students to age appropriate, exciting and interesting content to sustain their interest.

IV. GOOD READERS MAKE GOOD LEADERS!

What is in store for future generation?

Through shaping the future generation, and most especially the future leaders, educators have a greater responsibility. A good leader's distinguishing trait is that he reads voraciously. Reading can be an underlying trait possessed by a good chief. What is the main ingredient in Good Leadership Recipe? According to E. Balaji, President – People Services in a leading Supply Chain Management Company, important attributes such as intellect, expertise, higher cognitive processes, creativity, interpersonal skills and so on

make a leader. But the one fundamental characteristic of an excellent leader, which cuts through geographies and cultures, is the reading habit. Several studies have shown that reading can make one a much better leader, as it may be a way to acquire information and assimilate it.

A voracious reader, Napolean Bonaparte hired a personal librarian and took his favourite books to the battlefields. He frequently took time off creating an empire to lose himself in a good book. Another historical figure who was a man of letters, known for his erudition and reading, is Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union. Known for his sharp humour, American comedian Groucho Marx said he owed all his information to television. Every time someone turned on television, he moved to another room to read a book.
Knowledge, which is so important for leadership, can be acquired by extensive reading and reading a variety of fiction is known to improve social skills, outstanding communication, emotional intelligence and temperamental control.

To summarise, it is extremely important to develop good reading habits early in life. Reading offers the pleasure of a lifetime. Because of science and technology, the students have unparalleled exposure to a wide range of subjects at the touch of a button and off late, the core of education is technology. The COVID 19 situation has digitized learning to a very large degree, which otherwise would not have been so quick and far and wide ranging: (Retrieved from: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/).Modern technology plays a key role in education which makes it more interactive and personalized. It would be easy to fulfil the varied needs of various readers with the advent of modern technologies and the potentiality of emerging technology. There'll be a big change for anyone from one-size-fit to individualized preparation. The facilitators' job is to direct students to read effectively. Whether it's a book in hand or a tablet to read from, hooking up to books is certainly one of a person's most pleasurable experiences.

Notes

1.Mokhtari, *et al.*, 2009, p. 618.

2. Griswold and Wright, 2004, pp. 215–216.

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Improving Students' Speaking Skill by Using Role Play

Shaima Ahmed Al-Sheryani

Abstract

Many students in Oman find speaking as one of the most difficult skill in English. This study provided findings from an action research using role play as a task-based learning strategy to improve students' speaking skill. The population of the study was 29 grade three students from a cycle one basic education school. The researcher used classroom observations, field notes, and a group interview to collect the data. The researcher conducted 8 major lessons throughout a semester, three of conventional teaching and five lessons using role plays. The findings revealed that the students' speaking skill improved in areas including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy. The study also showed that the students' motivation and participation inside the classroom improved. Furthermore, the interview analysis confirmed the students' improvement in their speaking and attitude towards speaking lessons. Additionally, the research suggested some practical implications for EFL teachers and EFL learners.

Keywords: Role play strategy, speaking skill, communicative language teaching, EFL

Introduction

Speaking is one of the crucial skills that students need to acquire in order to master English in EFL context. This is because speaking is the tool by which learners can construct meaning (Brown, 2001). It involves receiving, processing, and producing information to communicate and interact with others orally. Therefore, students need to acquire some speaking sub-skills such as vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Harris, 1969; O'Malley, & Pierce, 1996). With this demand, teaching speaking can be a daunting task for teachers, especially when dealing with big classes of young learners. With lower grades, it is possible that some students may not have acquired any speaking skills in their mother tongue, which makes teaching speaking even more difficult.

Literature shows that many EFL students face difficulties in mastering the main basics of speaking skill (Al-Saadi, Tonawanik, & Al Harthy, 2013). This hinders their progress in acquiring the language and makes learning frustrating and challenging. Such situation applies to Omani students, as well. Facts show that Omani students have low language proficiency. Specifically, Omani students are not able to communicate using English effectively (Al-Issa, 2011). The weakness of Omani students' speaking skill could be attributed to two reasons. First, the Omani English curriculum lacks the focus on teaching speaking sub-skills efficiently (Al-Saadi, Tonawanik, & Al Harthy, 2013). For instance, English cycle one (grades 1-4) curriculum focuses on teaching accuracy through rote learning; drilling some language forms.

Second, Omani students have no opportunities to practise real speaking tasks similar to the real-life ones. Students in cycle one schools receive a period of 40 minutes English every day. Usually, there is an average of 25 to 30 students in a normal classroom, which means participation of each student is very limited. In addition, some teachers neglect speaking activities to finish the curriculum.

Once I joined the Specialized Institute for Professional Training of Teachers, I have started applying new strategies in teaching language skills. One of the approaches that I used was communicative language teaching (CLT). There is an increasing evidence that CLT has a strong impact on developing students' language (Richards, 2006; Littlewood, 2014). Literature provides different definition of CLT based on its advocates (Spada, 2007). Some advocates define CLT as "a meaning-based, learner-centered approach to L2 teaching where fluency is given priority over accuracy" (Spada, 2007, p.272). Others argue that CLT should provide learners with authentic opportunities for language practice (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010). Richards, et al. (1992) explain that CLT is an approach to teach English as a foreign language, which stresses that the gaol of language learning is communicative competence.

While speaking is "one of the central elements of communication in EFL teaching" (Aliakbari & Jamalvandi, 2010, p.15), it is neglected in the curriculum of Omani schools. As stated previously, to improve students' speaking skill, students need to be provided with adequate opportunities to practise language. This can be done through good quality of communicative activities such as communicative games, dialogues, or role plays. To this end, I applied task-based learning (TBL) in my classroom. TBL is considered a strong version of CLT that has powerful impact on developing students' language (Littlewood, 2014). Particularly, I used role play strategy to involve the students in practising English.

Literature review

Using role play as a teaching strategy in English classroom has become popular in recent years, especially in EFL context. According to Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary (1994), role play is defined as "the act of imitating the character and behavior of a type of a person who is very different from yourself, either deliberately, for example as a training exercise, or without knowing it" (p. 1526). In this sense, students act out some specific roles and functions that are parts of situations from real life but are brought as imaginaries into the classroom. As a guided conversation technique, role play provides a good context or framework in which students can develop speaking through practising language and creating their own sentences. Through role play, students explore their own language resources, learn from their classmates, and build on their experiences to improve confidence and ability to use the language.

Role play is believed to have profound impact on speaking skills including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy in addition to improving learners' motivation and participation. Ments (1999) claims that by practising different imaginary scenes of everyday life, students can increase their vocabulary and improve their linguistic competence. In a role play, students are encouraged to use the language naturally which helps improving pronunciation. Moreover, role play helps students to acquiring the language very quickly and easily because they experience it in use holistically (Willis, 1996). Students pay closer attention to the language features and practise them in a more creative way (Doff, 1988).

Role play can also be a motivational tool. It has high appeal for students because the different imaginary situations add interest to the lesson (Doff, 1988; Ments, 1999; Richard-Amato, 2003). Lucantoni (2002) highlights that role play can be a 'very enjoyable' task. Students are asked to play different parts of someone else in an interesting way. Students also express their ideas and feelings in a stress-free

environment. This helps students to build confidence and strong interaction with classmates which overall leads to improving classroom participation (Ashok, 2015).

Several studies on role play in EFL context (Arismayang, 2016; Neupane, 2019; Rochman, 2014; Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018) reported positive impact on learners' speaking skill. Students became fluent, motivated, and enthusiastic (Arismayang, 2016; Ladousse, 1995; Rochman, 2014). The students found lessons more interesting and involving which encouraged them to participate in speaking. In another example, Aprianti, Marhum, and Budi (2016) conducted a study using experimental design to investigate if role play would develop grade 8 students' speaking skill. They found that the students in the experimental group improved their fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension.

As noted above, some studies on role play reported improvement in students' speaking. However, these studies were conducted in middle schools and universities. Almost no study has investigated using role play with young learner in primary schools. As I also mentioned before, my students faced difficulties in improving their speaking. To address these issues, this research was conducted. The study focused on exploring the impact of using role play on developing students' speaking, the way role play was applied, the aspects of improvement in students' speaking, and the students' perspectives of using role play.

Methodology

Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was first, to improve grade three students' speaking skill. The second purpose is to to follow up on the previous research of using role play to improve speaking with the focus on young learners. In doing so, the study explored the impact of using role play in developing the students' speaking. The main research question was: how can I improve my grade 3 learners' speaking skill using role-play strategy? To answer this question, the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What difficulties do grade 3 students face in speaking?
2. How is role-play as a task-based learning strategy used to improve the students' speaking skill?
3. Which aspects of speaking have improved with the students?
4. What are the students' perspectives on being taught through role play strategy?

Participants

This action research study was undertaken in a third-grade classroom in Shumoo'a Al-Marifa Basic Education School (1-4). The participants were 29 students in grade three, 18 were males and 11 were females. This sample was selected because first, they were my students which was convenient for me. Second, these students faced some difficulties in speaking and their scores were low based on the Student Assessment Handbook (SAH).

Students' level	Males	Females
High achievers	7	5
Average students	7	6
Low achievers	4	0
Total	18	11

Table 1 Sample of the Study

Research design

Action research approach was utilized in this study to improve students' English speaking (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The researcher investigated the effect of using role play on students' speaking skill. The teacher first taught the class three speaking lessons following the conventional way in the teacher's book. These lessons included: what people wear, life cycle of a planet, and an animal's life. Then, the class was taught other five speaking lessons using role play strategy.

The role play lessons included: food shopping, National Day, making fruit juice, and acting out two stories. In the food shopping lesson, the teacher changed the classroom environment and created small shops. The students asked the shopkeepers using the form "can I have …, please?" For the National Day lesson, the classroom was decorated and the students wore different Omani costumes. The students practised asking each other "what are you doing?" Then, the students moved around, asked each other, and described how they celebrate the National Day.

In the third lesson, the teacher made a banana juice showing the students the tools, ingredients, and the steps of making the juice. Then each group was asked to make fruit juice describing the tools, ingredients, and the steps. As a homework, the students were asked to record themselves making a juice. The last two lessons were acting out two stories from the class book. One story was about "Three Billy Goats". The students practised the scenes and prepared the masks. The layout of the classroom was changed to fit the context of the story. The same thing was applied to the second story which was "Watch the Baby". The classroom was divided into rooms in which there were dangerous tools that may harm the baby. The students moved around the rooms to practise a dialogue between the mother and the father on how to protect the baby.

Data collection

The instruments which were used to collect data included teacher's field notes, classroom observations, tape recordings, and a group interview. The classroom observations and tape recordings were used to answer the first and third questions about the difficulties that students faced in speaking and the improved aspects of their speaking. The classroom observation sheet was developed based on SAH criteria of speaking for grade three. It included observed elements of participation, motivation, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy with rating scale of 5 degrees. The teachers noted down the number of students for each observed element with their levels, high, average, or low achievers. Table 2 illustrates the classroom observation sheet. Furthermore, the teacher's field notes were taken during and after lessons and they were used to answer the second question about the application way of role play.

Additionally, a group interview was administered to answer question four about the students' perspectives on being taught through using role play. The interview was in Arabic for the participants' understanding and lasted for 15 minutes and the responses were transcribed for the analysis. To reduce the stressful feeling that might have been produced on the participants, the teacher explained the purpose, confidentiality, and privacy of the study for the students (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Data analysis

Participants' identities were protected and numeric identifiers were used. Data were collected using field notes, observations, recordings and interview and they were transformed into written notes and transcripts.

To answer RQs 1 and 3, the students were observed and videotaped in the eight lessons. Collected data from each lesson were summarised in tables. Overall averages of the students' participation and performance were calculated for the conventional and role play lessons. The data of the conventional lessons were analysed to specify the difficulties that the students faced. The data were then compared to determine the improved aspects of the students' speaking.

To answer RQ 2, the teacher's field notes about the intervention were analysed and the teacher's way of using role play was summarised. Finally, to answer RQ 4, content analysis was used. The participants' responses were coded and the emerged themes were regrouped together into categories.

Findings

Students' speaking difficulties

Table 2 shows the overall average of the students' speaking performance in the three conventional lessons. About 14 students were reluctant to participate in the speaking activities. Only 11 students were motivated to participate and most of them were outstanding and average. It was observed that the students had poor performance in vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy. The students had very limited vocabulary except for some high achievers. Seven outstanding students were fluent in speaking, but the others had problems in delivering messages clearly. Most of the students had many grammatical mistakes that broke down the communication. Additionally, the students tended to use Arabic most of the time. Low achievers, on the other hand, were totally shy and reluctant to participate in the speaking activities.

N	Observed element	Students' performance (number & percentage)				
		Poor 1-20%	**Fair 21-40%**	**Good 41-60%**	**Very good 61-80%**	**Excellent 81-100%**
1.	**Participation**			15s (10h, 4a, 1w) 56.7%		
2.	**Motivation**		11s (8h, 3a) 37.9%			
3.	**Vocabulary:** use rich vocabulary		9s (8h, 1a) 31%			
4.	**Pronunciation:** clear and easy to understand			14s (10h, 4a) 48.3%		
5.	**Fluency:** produce spoken texts and interact with others		7h 24.1%			
6.	**Accuracy:** few grammatical mistakes	4h, 13.8%				

*s: students, h: high achievers, a: average students, w: low achievers

Table 2 Classroom observation – Traditional Lessons

How was role play used?

The teacher applied role plays by first engaging the students in learning the concepts, vocabulary, and the ideas through practice. Sometimes, the teacher asked outstanding students to act out the scenes, so other students would have the chance to observe and re-enact the situations again in their groups. The teacher constructed learning groups according to the students' needs. Learning in groups stimulated the students to clarify, explain, reorganise, and reconceptualise the information. Thus, the students had the opportunity to encounter new ideas, language forms, and perceptions that were different from theirs. Therefore, new knowledge can be gained through this interaction. Learning through using role play and in groups had the potential to develop the students' speaking by affording them the opportunity to observe, practise, and get feedback from their peers.

In addition, the teacher intended to design appropriate and meaningful role play activities. The teacher followed some constructive steps including defining the objectives of the activities, determining the social contexts, defining time limit, describing roles of the participants clearly, observing, and noting down feedbacks for the students.

Aspects of speaking improvement

The students' speaking improved after the intervention. The outstanding, average, and low achieving students participated enthusiastically in the lessons. The role plays helped them to practise the language in a comfortable environment. Table 3 illustrates the overall average of the students' performance in the five role play lessons. The students' average performance in each element of speaking was better than before the intervention. All the students participated enthusiastically in the speaking activities. Most of them improved

their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Even in accuracy, they did better compared to the stage before the intervention. Overall, the role plays boosted the students' speaking skill.

N	Observed element	Students' Performance (number & percentage)				
		Poor 1-20%	**Fair 21-40%**	**Good 41-60%**	**Very good 61-80%**	**Excellent 81-100%**
1.	**Participation**					27s (12h, 13a, 2w) 93.1%
2.	**Motivation**					27s (12h, 13a, 2w) 93.1%
3.	**Vocabulary:** use rich vocabulary				22s (10h, 10a, 2w) 75.9%	
4.	**Pronunciation:** clear and easy to understand					26s (11h, 12a, 3w) 89.7%
5.	**Fluency:** produce spoken texts and interact with others				22s (11h, 10a, 1w) 75.9%	
6.	**Accuracy:** few grammatical mistakes			15s (8h, 7a) 51.7%		

*s: students, h: high achievers, a: average students, w: low achievers

Table 3 Classroom observation – Role Play Lessons

Students' perspectives of using role play

The whole class interview was conducted after the intervention. There were 27 students in the classroom and 2 students were absent. The interview was in Arabic and lasted for 15 minutes. Table 4 and Table 5 show the students' responses to the interview.

N	Question	Yes	Not sure	No
1.	Did you like the new approach we followed in the speaking lessons?	27 93.1%		
2.	Were you motivated to talk and participate in the speaking activities?	27 93.1%		
3.	Did you feel confident and active?	23 79.3%	4 13.8 %	
4.	Were you enthusiastic to do the tasks?	27 93.1%		
5.	Did you like working in groups and pairs?	25 86.2%	2 6.9%	
6.	Did you like the way we changed the environment of the classroom to suit the activity?	27 93.1%		
7.	Can you use the language outside the classroom?	22 75.9%	5 17.2 %	

*Absence was about 6.9%.

Table 4 Students' Feedback on Role Play

The interview indicated that the role plays had positive and powerful impact on students' learning. Table 4 shows that most of the students agreed with the seven items. All of them liked the role play lessons. The students were motivated and enthusiastic. They liked the stress-free environment and working in groups. They felt confident, active, and able to practise their English outside the classroom. The percentage of agreement with all the seven items was high, more than 79.3%. Some of the students were not sure in issues related to working in groups, confidence, and using the language outside the classroom. These students were low achievers and two were average. These students appeared to be afraid of agreeing on being confident and speaking outside the classroom. Thus, it can be concluded that most of the students believed that play role was beneficial learning tool.

8. What was the most element you enjoyed in the role play lessons?	**Category**
I liked the new strategy of teaching speaking.	
We were motivated to participate and talk.	Motivation
Now I am confident and brave to talk in the classroom.	Confidence
The lessons were amazing.	Enthusiasm
I liked working with my group.	Group work
The teacher let me work with my friend.	Pair work
We liked changing the environment of the classroom and bringing realia.	classroom environment & using realia
I remember the dialogue easily.	
We felt relaxed and comfortable.	Stress-free environment
I enjoyed moving around the classroom listening to my friends.	Environment
I enjoyed wearing the Omani costume and decorating the classroom.	Environment & hands on activities
I liked asking the chef how to make a fruit juice, but its taste was not good.	Hands on activities
I prepared for the lesson at home and my mother helped me.	Enthusiasm
We can use the language with our families and in shops.	Fluency
We were moving and talking and you relaxed.	Participation
I like English because we try new things every time.	Hands on activities

Table 5 Students' Most Enjoyable Element of Role Plays

The students' responses to the open-ended question in the interview were categorized into themes. Most of the students reported positive feedback about using role play. The students' responses can be classified under two main categories. The first one was related to the students' attitudes towards using role play. Themes emerged under this category included motivation, enthusiasm, confidence, grouping techniques, stress-free environment, realia, and hands on activities. For instance, some claimed that "now [they are] confident and brave to talk in the classroom." Others stated that they "were motivated to participate and talk." Those who felt relaxed inside the classroom pointed out that they "felt relax and comfortable" and that they "enjoyed moving around the class and listening to [their] friends."

The second category was related to the students' speaking performance. The students indicated that role play helped them becoming fluent and able to use their language outside the classroom, as exemplified by one student stating that "we can use the language

with our families and in shops." Others highlighted that role play helped their accuracy, "I remember the dialogue easily."

Discussion

The findings from this study revealed that the students made a good progress in their speaking skills including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy. The students were rated fair, good, fair, and poor respectively in the previous speaking sub-skills before implementing the role plays. However, after the intervention, the students were rated in the same sub-skills as very good, excellent, very good, and good respectively. These results support those of the previous studies (Aprianti, Marhum, & Budi, 2016; Arismayang, 2016; Ladousse, 1995; Rochman, 2014; Zhang, 2010) in that the students were able to use the target language more fluently and accurately. Unlike the other studies, this study showed progress different speaking sub-skills and other dimensions including motivation and participation. The students were highly motivated and participated enthusiastically in the classroom. Furthermore, the interview analysis confirmed the students' speaking improvement and showed the students' positive attitudes. The students were confident, motivated, fluent, and eager to use English outside the classroom. They liked working in groups in a comfortable environment.

Role play creates an involving and stress-free environment which encourages students to participate in learning (Zhang, 2010). Thus, students get adequate opportunities to practise language (Wafaa, 2014), learn from each other, and receive constructive feedback from classmates and teachers. As a result, students develop their speaking skill. It seems reasonable then that if students extend their practice of the language, their language speaking will be improved as the adage implies that "practice makes perfect." The following figure illustrates the dynamic of role play strategy in improving speaking.

Figure 1 The Dynamic of Role Play

Before applying the role play strategy, most of the students faced difficulties in their speaking. This was because the students lacked the opportunities to practise English. However, with the application of role play activities, the students were subconsciously involved in learning which affected their speaking positively. Other elements including the students' interests and the absence of the teacher's interference had also played indirect role in the students' motivation. The role play activities were hands on types of activities which embedded involving feature that helped the students to use language. Accordingly, using role play in this research was effective and led the improvement of the students' speaking skill.

Conclusion

This study revealed that using role play strategy in teaching speaking improved the students' speaking skill. The students' speaking sub-skills including vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy were improved. In addition, the students' motivation and participation were improved. Using role play strategy also enhanced the learners' attitudes towards learning English.

Completing this action research was a great experience for the teacher. Through her research, the teacher gained some teaching skills and knowledge. The teacher discovered that using communicative and hands on activities was a great way to get the students involved in learning language. Also, the teacher found that creating a stress-free and comfortable classroom atmosphere had a powerful impact on stimulating the students' motivation, participation, and eagerness to learning. Undoubtedly, the teacher became aware of the importance of adapting traditional ways of teaching to suit students' needs and interests. In her opinion, teachers need to design engaging activities, instead of delivering traditional lessons that make the students passive learners. Role play, as a task-based learning strategy, can incorporate positive elements of active learning and interesting teaching, when designed accordingly and implemented successfully.

It is important to point out that the current study has some limitations. First, it was a small-scale study which was carried out in a semester. The results might have been more accurate and significant if the intervention was applied throughout the academic year. Second, the study was limited to one class of grade three in the school. It would be better to increase the sample size for the reliability of the study.

The findings of this research provide some practical implications for English teachers and EFL students. First, EFL teachers are recommended to adapt English lessons and use role play strategy in order to improve students' speaking, motivation, and learning. When used appropriately, role play strategy is a great way to get students actively involved in their learning. Second, teachers should be flexible with students and not to interfere correcting errors in practice stage. Third, students should be encouraged and guided to practise language inside and outside the classroom. Finally, it is recommended that a similar study should be duplicated using bigger sample to explore how such speaking improvement happens. This will have a potential to enrich English learning and teaching practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Classroom Observation

N	Observed element	Performance based on the number of students and the percentage to the total number				
		Poor 1-20%	**Fair 21-40%**	**Good 41-60%**	**Very good 61-80%**	**Excellent 81-100%**
1.	**Participation**					
2.	**Motivation**					
3.	**Vocabulary:** use rich vocabulary					
4.	**Pronunciation:** clear and easy to understand					
5.	**Fluency:** can produce spoken texts and interact with others					
6.	**Accuracy:** few grammatical mistakes					

*s: students, h: high achievers, a: average students, w: low achievers

Appendix B: Student Interview

The interview

The interview was originally in Arabic. The questions were translated into English as follows:

1. Did you like the new approach we followed in the speaking lessons?
2. Were you motivated to talk and participate in the speaking activities?
3. Did you feel confident and active?
4. Were you enthusiastic to do the tasks?
5. Did you like working in groups and pairs?
6. Did you like the way we changed the environment of the classroom to suit the activity?
7. Can you use the language outside the classroom?
8. What was the most element you enjoyed in the role-play strategy?

Appendix C: Role Play Lessons Plans

Lesson Plan 1

<table>
<tr><td>Date: 25-9-2018</td><td>Grade: Three</td><td>Theme: Special Days</td><td>Unit: 1</td><td>Lesson: 5</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Learning outcome:
▪ Students will be able to name special days in Oman
▪ Students will be able to talk about how to celebrate the National Day</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Potential Challenges: some students may not know how to express themselves in English. Therefore, they are going to practice the dialogue in their small groups to feel confident and comfortable.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Warm up:
● Students talk about the special days in Oman.
● Students watch a video about the Omani National Day.
● Each group has a sheet of paper with a short paragraph describing how to celebrate the National Day. They read it and practice it in their groups.
● The students walk around the groups asking, “what are you doing?” and listening to their friends describing how to celebrate the National day.
✔ At home: video tape yourself interviewing one of your family. Ask them how they celebrate the Eid. Send the video to your teacher to post it in the school Instagram account.</td><td>Materials:
pic
laptop-projector-speakers
papers
Flags-costumes-decorations</td><td>Time:
5 min
10 min
20 min
15 min</td><td>Evaluation & Assessment:
Individual (V+K)
➢ speaking
individual (K+A)
➢ listening
group work
➢ reading+speaking
group work (K+V+A)
➢ speaking</td></tr>
</table>

Lesson Plan 2

Date: 7 / 10/ 2018	**Grade:** Three	**Theme:** food	**Unit:** 2	**Lesson:** 2

Learning outcome:

- Students will be able to identify names of food.
- Students will be able to listen and complete dialogues.
- Students will be able to write a sentence using "Can I have…..please?"

Warm up:	**Materials:**	**Time:**	**Evaluation & Assessment**
● The teacher divides the students into 2 groups and does a pictuanary game with them.	Word cards-papers	5 min	○ Listening ○ Speaking ○ Reading ○ Pair work ○ Group work
● The teacher distributes flashcards of food and word cards to students and asks them to move and find their partners.	Flashcards-Word cards	5 min 4 min	
● The teacher divides the students into 6 groups using small pictures of food. Students who have the same pictures sit in the same group.	Small pictures of food	6 min	
● Each group has a list of foods. They read it and bring the food from the basket. The teacher checks the baskets in each group.	List of foods Basket-real food	3 min 10 min	
● Students read the conversation between Sami and the shopkeeper in class book p. 13.	Class book Baskets of food	7 min	
● One student from each group be the shopkeeper and the other members practice the conversation with him/her using the basket of food they have in their groups.	Worksheets CD player	5 min	
● The teacher distributes worksheets of 3 conversations with missing words. Students listen and complete the dialogues. They check their answers with their groups.	Class book		
● Students write a question using " Can I have…..please?" in class book p.13 choosing any food.			

Homework:
The students write a dialogue with a shopkeeper in their Exercise books.

Lesson Plan 3

Date: 1-11-2018	Grade: Three	Theme: big or small?	Unit: 3	Lesson: 8
Learning outcome: ▪ Students will be able to listen and understand a story ▪ Students will be able to act out the story				
Potential Challenges: low-achiever students may face difficulties in performing the story. Therefore, they are going to act out simple scenarios.				

Warm up:	Materials:	Time:	Evaluation & Assessment:
● The teacher introduces the characters of the story (the three goats-the monster)	FC	3 min	
● Students read the story silently.	CB	7 min	
● Students listen to the story and repeat the frequent dialogues.	CD player-Big Book	10min	
● Students cut the pictures of characters from the back of CB	Scissors-CB	5 min 8min	Role-play ➢ speaking
● Students practice the dialogue from the worksheets given by the teacher	worksheets	12min	
● Students act out the dialogue using the pictures.	pictures		

Lesson Plan 4

Date: 21-11-2018	**Grade:** Three	**Theme:** machines	**Unit:** 4	**Lesson:** 8
Learning outcome: ▪ Students will be able to listen and understand a story (watch the baby) ▪ Students will be able to act out the story				
Potential Challenges: low-achiever students may face difficulties in performing the story. Therefore, they are going to act out simple scenarios.				

Warm up:	**Materials:**	**Time:**	**Evaluation & Assessment:**
● The teacher introduces the characters of the story (mummy-daddy-baby)	FC	3 min	
● Students read the story silently.	CB	7 min	
● Students listen to the story and repeat the frequent dialogues.	CD player-Big Book	10min	
● Students are divided to work in pairs and practice one dialogue between mum and dad. The classroom is divided into the rooms appeared in the story.	Dangerous materials	15 min 10min	Role-play ➢ speaking
● Students act out the story.			

Lesson Plan 5

<table>
<tr><td>Date: 3-12-2018</td><td>Grade: Three</td><td>Theme: Machines</td><td>Unit: 4</td><td>Lesson: 14</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Learning outcome:
▪ Students will be able to identify names of machines.
▪ Students will be able to identify names of fruits.
▪ Students will be able to make fruit juice.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Potential Challenges: students may not know how to follow steps to make juice. They are going to watch a video and the teacher will model making bananas juice in front of them.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Warm up:
● The teacher revises names of machines using eggs strategy. Students open eggs, read the words and point to the flashcards.
● The teacher revises names of machines using jumping game. Teacher calls a machine name and students jump on the mat to bring the material.
● The teacher introduces ‘mixer machine’ and explains its parts.
● The teacher revises names of fruits using tree strategy. Students choose fruit pictures from the basket and stick them in the tree.
● The teacher revises names of fruit using the clown and balloons game. Teacher calls a name of fruit and students search for the balloon with that name and stick it in the clown’s hand.
● Students watch a video about making fruit juice.
● The teacher makes bananas juice.
● Students are divided into 2 groups, boys and girls. Each group makes fruit juice.
● Students complete the task in the skills books p. 37
✔ At home: Make fruit juice with your mum. Send the photos or video to your teacher. The teacher posts them on Instagram.</td><td>Materials:
Eggs-FC-pointer
Jumping mat-realia
Poster of mixer
Tree- pictures of fruit and other things
Poster of a clown- balloons
Laptop-projector-speaker
A mixer-bananas-sugar-ice cream-milk
Mixers-fruits-milk-sugar-cups
SB</td><td>Time:
5 min
7 min
3 min
7 min
6 min
3min
8 min
10 min
8 min</td><td>Evaluation & Assessment:
Individual (V+K)
➢ reading
individual (K+A)
➢ listening
(V)
individual (K+V)
individual (K+A)
➢ listening & reading
➢ listening (A)
(A+V)
group work (K+A+V)
➢ speaking & listening
➢ reading (V)</td></tr>
</table>

Language Emergence in Multimodal CALL Environments*

Faisal Al Saidi

Abstract

Contemporary technologies facilitate the combination of various modes of communication such as image, sound, written language, and animation among others – in other words, multimodality. This study investigates the process of the emergence of authentic language use in collaborative multimodal activities within computer-assisted language learning (CALL) environments. The study adopted a qualitative research design within which observations of naturally-occurring interaction and language use were used and followed with stimulated recall interviews. Data were drawn from twelve groups of three to four learners within three English language classes from a foundation programme in one Omani college. The findings of this study indicated that the language emergence process in collaborative CALL environments is triggered by a process of signalling relevance (perceived link between cues in the activity and the goal of the activity) followed by an action (e.g., a discussion or rereading of the text) and finally the act of evaluating that information as to whether or not it is relevant. This process was found to be influenced by the participants' interaction with the multimodal components in the collaborative CALL environment. The study concludes by identifying a range of recommendations derived from the findings for facilitating the occurrence of authentic language use in a collaborative multimodal CALL environment.

Keywords: Computer-assisted language Learning (CALL), Authentic Language, Multimodal Activities

Introduction

Previous studies in the Omani higher education context have indicated a positive relationship between the use of technology and aspects of language learning such as autonomy and learning strategies (as in Chirciu & Mishra, 2014), motivation (Ambu-Saidi, 2010), provision of social support and scaffolding for learners (Alkharusi, Kazem, Al-Musawai, 2009), and cognitive and behavioural engagement (Gasmi & Thomas, 2017). Other studies have extensively investigated issues related to lack of training, time and space within the context of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and found that such issues were major factors hindering a more effective use of technology in the classroom (e.g., Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al Musawi, 2002; 2007; Al-Senaidi, Lin & Poirot, 2009; Terry, 2016). The conclusions from these studies have made a valuable contribution in the areas under investigation, and have helped provide a broad understanding of many of the issues in technology rich language learning environments; however, they seem to have overlooked the actual processes of language use in language learning environments in which technology is part.

The current study adopts an ecological approach to investigate how the process of language emergence occurs in a collaborative multimodal activity within a CALL environment aiming to find out ''what is really happening when [English] is learned with the help of technology'' (Stickler & Shi, 2016, p. 120). By addressing this area of CALL research in Oman, my study makes an original contribution to the body of research

conducted in an Omani context, and also adds to the universal knowledge on how the emergence of authentic language use takes place in collaborative multimodal language learning activities within CALL environments.

Multimodality in CALL environments

The use of modern technologies in the language classroom facilitates the combination of various modes of communication such as image, sound, text, and animation among others (Álvarez, 2016) – that is, multimodality. CALL environments therefore correspondingly offer obvious opportunities for multimodal approaches to education by including materials and teaching methods that stimulate several sensory modes of communication simultaneously, for example, auditory, visual or tactile, and "each of the modes available [in CALL environments] provides specific potentials and limitations for communication" (Kress, 2005, p. 5). While each mode can be viewed independently, nevertheless the process of sense-making of any interaction as a whole involves the contribution of each mode in its interaction with all other modes (Kress, 2015).

Within multimodal learning environments and particularly in those that are technologically rich, there is a greater opportunity and expectation, than in 'traditional' classrooms, that learners will be active and autonomous agents (Abrams, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). In other words, multimodal learning environments induce situations in which learners are more likely to be "agents who are making meaning and producing texts and who are also constantly remaking the representational resources in the process [resulting in] a situation of permanent change" (Hampel & Hauck, 2006, p. 6). This understanding of the role of the learners in multimodal CALL environments is built on the idea that learners choose their own reading path (Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Much of the recent literature on multimodality in CALL has revealed a link between working on multimodal materials and learners' agency. One of those studies explored the role of multimodality in the learners' comprehension of a story which they acted out (Barton & Baguley, 2014). Data for that study were collected from videos (of rehearsals and the final performance), interviews, reflections, and from samples of students' work. Drawing on the theory of semiotics, which emphasises the integral role that all modes play in the process of meaning making (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), the study found that having to act out the story without the script, offered the learners an opportunity to choose the way in which they demonstrated and expressed their understanding. It was found that, the learners were active and self-directed in the way they performed in those multimodal environments. Also, with more rehearsals, it was found that both "the complexity and level of expression increased understanding not only of the performance process but also the story" (Barton & Baguley, 2014, p. 104-105). While this lends more support to the argument for the positive role of multimodality in improving comprehension, it highlights the role of the multimodal environment in providing the learners with opportunities in which they make their own decisions concerning ways of understanding language-related material and content.

One feature of multimodal collaborative CALL environments that relates to their complexity is concerned with the learners' variable points of entry and engagement with the CALL materials. As has been noted, one of the ways in which multimodal materials facilitate language learning is in their capacity to enable learners to enter a text, become

involved with the English language and transform the text into a meaningful action (Xerri, 2016). This understanding of the role of the various entry points in multimodal environments is explained on the basis that "each mode offers a different way into representation and focuses on different aspects of meaning'' (Jewitt, 2005, p. 7). Additionally, other studies have emphasised that the learners' entry points to the multimodal texts are facilitated by the way in which the activity is structured and by the teacher's intervention (e.g., Liam, 2012; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). However, these studies do not address how students select an entry point and how that selection relates to the learners' language use. Given this gap and considering the arguments for selecting entry points in influencing learners' engagement and meaning making processes, it was taken into consideration that exploring the learners' access points in the collaborative CALL environment might provide insight into investigating the process of language emergence within the CALL environment.

Multimodal affordances in CALL environments

The concept of affordances is useful for this study as both a tool of analysis and as a conceptual framework. It has been described in the literature in different ways. In what is considered to be one of the earliest definitions, the concept represented what the environment has to offer to the agent either for good or ill (Gibson, 1979). While that early definition emphasises the 'offering' of the environment, in recent definitions of the concept, emphasis has been shifted to be on the ways in which the agents respond to the 'offering' of the environment (Scarantino, 2003) and on the relational possibilities of action in order to achieve certain goals (van Lier, 2004). Described in this latter way, affordances are argued to be constructed by the learner when s/he is active and engaged in the learning environment (Ahn, 2016; van Lier, 2004). These views broaden the early description of affordances as they extend the scope of the concept from only focussing on what the environment offers (as in Gibson, 1979) to what the learners construct by being active and involved in their environment. This is the view of affordances that has been adopted in this study because it incorporates the external as well as internal resources available for the learners in the CALL environment.

Affordances are argued to be operationalised through cycles of perception and action (Thoms, 2014; Young, Barab, & Garrett, 2000; Zheng, Young, Wagner, & Brewer, 2009). In a study that investigated the use of strategies for reading computer-based texts at home and school, a number of reading strategies were identified that reflected a similar cycle of perception and action (Park & Kim, 2016). In this study, teachers encouraged the learners to read different types of computer-based texts based on the goals of the classes. The participants verbally reported what they thought and did while reading. It was found that active learners made critical decisions about which texts to read and what information to choose. Those decisions were taken after setting up a purpose for reading (e.g., finding information about the moon), which was followed by reviews and evaluations of the texts. It was also found that the process of reviewing those texts involved predictions based on textual cues such as a word in the title. This view of affordances as cycles of perception and action informed the decision in the current study to examine the ways in which learners perceive cues from the environment and the ways in which such perception relates to their actions and interactions within the multimodal CALL environment.

Study design

The study adopted a qualitative enquiry design within which the researcher sought to understand the meaning individuals ascribe to a social or human issue (Creswell, 2009). For this study, qualitative research was deemed suitable because it has been presented in the literature as a research design that helps to capture data to understand the phenomenon from within (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaňa, 2014) and at the same time to render and retain its complexity and integrity (Creswell, 2009).

The study was also guided by an inductive approach that was intended to explore connections and correlations of the phenomenon from within (Cohen et al, 2011; Miles et al, 2014) and at the same time to render and retain its complexity and integrity (Creswell, 2009). The study investigated the ways in which language emergence related to collaboration and interaction within the naturally-occurring context of the collaborative CALL environment based on how the participants ascribed meaning to the ways in which they interacted in the collaborative CALL environment. Deciding to investigate how authentic language use emerges in the natural setting of the CALL environments within a qualitative enquiry that operates through an inductive approach guided me to give primacy to the ways in which the participants ascribed meaning to their own processes of language use and interaction.

Location and participants

The data for this study were obtained from one of the Colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman, and the participants were selected from English language CALL classes that took place in one of the foundation programmes. In the foundation programme at this college, one English language class from every language course is scheduled to take place in a computer lab once a week – i.e., CALL classes, which was the reason why I chose this college and foundation programme for data collection. After identifying three potential collaborative CALL classes, access was negotiated and informed consent was gained from the learners and class teachers. The selection criteria for the classes were mainly based on whether or not those classes had collaborative CALL activities as part of them.

The process of selecting the groups that contributed to data collection was conducted as follows. Each class had already been divided into between five and eight groups. Depending on the class, these groups had been formed either by the students themselves or had been allocated by the teacher. For the groups participating in this study, I addressed the whole class and invited volunteers; in this case the learners in these groups volunteered by raising their hands. I then explained the procedures, ensured that they consented, and arranged the cameras to observe them. I also agreed with the participants a time and place to conduct the stimulated recall interviews, which would be within a day of the observations.

Data collection

Data for the study were gathered from in-class observations followed by stimulated recall interviews. In qualitative research, observations have been used to capture the physical, social/cultural, and linguistic contexts of the studied behaviour in order to help enquirers to collect as a full account as possible of the events under study (Bell, 2005; Borg, 2006; Cohen et al, 2011; Duff, 2008). This view of the use of observations as a tool to capture

the wholeness of the natural context within which the phenomenon is investigated has led other researchers to suggest using stimulated recall in conjunction with the use of observations (Fox-Turnbull, 2009; Lyle, 2003).

It has been noted that stimulated recall is suitable to uncover the different contexts and characteristics of interactions that influence the participants' behaviour (Dempsey, 2010), and it, at the same time, helps to explore some aspects of the thought processes of the participants (O'Brien, 1993). In a previous study that aimed to evaluate the use of stimulated recall in gaining insight into the thinking behind participants' decision making to meet specified goals while working on technology-enhanced learning activities, it was concluded that the stimulated recall interviews allowed the researcher insight into the participants' thinking processes and to their understanding of technological practices and processes (Fox-Turnbull, 2009).

In addition to being semi-structured, the interviews in this study involved the use of video stimuli in order to aid the participants to remember and comment on what happened during those processes of collaboration and language use. In this study, the use of video-recordings as the recall stimuli for the participants helped preserve the language-based and non-language-based characters of the interactions from the collaborative CALL environment (Duff, 2008). It has been recognised, however, that the use of stimulated recall can result in reflections on what should have happened instead of reporting what happened (Borg, 2006). To mitigate this issue, the stimulated recall interviews in this study were conducted within 24 hours after the lesson. Furthermore, the prompts used in this study were presented in a way that aimed to encourage the participants to recall and retrace their thought processes while acting and interacting in certain ways not to reflect on what they saw in the video-recordings. For example, a question like 'There, when you suddenly pointed at the screen, what were you thinking?' invited the participant to recall his/her thinking and encouraged them to verbalise their thoughts at that point in time. This kind of questions, as has been argued elsewhere, does not lead to a certain answer, and it does not ask to reflect on idealised actions (Borg, 2006).

Because the video-recordings were of the whole 110-minute collaborative CALL lessons, it was not possible to play the full videos to the participants who expressed that they would be able to take part in 30 to 60 minute-interviews. The interviews were conducted in the two-hour break that the participants had between their classes; that meant having no longer than one-hour interviews per group of each class. Hence, I had to select specific video episodes of three to five minutes to use in the stimulated recall interviews. The selection of the episodes to be used as stimuli in the video stimulated recall interviews was based on two criteria. The first criterion was whether they illustrated forms of collaboration and language use as these were the key areas of interest in this study. The second criterion was the existence of physical signs of noticing such as sudden pointing at the screen and changes in facial expressions as well as linguistic indications of noticing. The video recordings were stopped at such points to ask the participants about what they were thinking and about the reasons behind some of their language as well as non-language behaviour.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was the method used in this study to analyse the data generated from the video stimulated recall interviews. Through an inductive approach, the processes

within the method of thematic analysis helped me in this study to address the phenomenon of language emergence in the collaborative CALL environment by detecting patterns from the data in a bottom-up way (data-driven patterns). In this study thematic analysis was used as a process that began with coding, which is described in the literature as capturing and labelling occurrences that relate to the phenomenon under study (Boyatzis, 1998). The identification of codes in this study was at the latent level of the data as the coding process involved identifying and examining underlying ideas and conceptualisations (Braun & Clark, 2006). Moreover, the process of coding and categorising the codes in this study was never a linear process. The process of coding and theming was 'reflexive' and 'fluid' (ibid.). In that reflexive process, I was actively involved in labelling, relabelling, splitting and merging the codes leading to the final shape they are presented in in Chapter Five. A sample of the initial coding process is presented in the following table that shows how some of the codes in this study were developed.

Data Extract (R= researcher, A, B, C = participants)	**Initial codes**
1 R. Here you started saying 'scientist, scientist' and you were typing	
2 something.	
3 What was in your mind? What did you want to say?	
4 B: I think it was 'what doing', 'what doing' [In English]. It was talking about something that the person did, the scientist.	5
…	
6 A: We thought that the scientist we have to choose is different.	
7 I mean he/she invented something	***Anticipation***
8 C: We thought of a scientist, a new scientist we did not know about;	
9 so we put scientist so that we know a bigger group of scientists.	*Entering generic terms*
10 R: Ok, so the minute you saw the screen, after typing scientists,	
11 what came into your mind?	**Topical Background**
12 A: The minute we saw Marie Curie; we remembered what she	**knowledge/**
13 invented/explored and how she died and the impact of her	**Visual and textual**
14 exploration on the world.	

***Table 1**_A coding sample*

To explain, the example extract in Table 1 shows that lines one to five from this part of the data did not receive any code because the participant here was describing what was on the web-page without an explicit link to her language use or collaboration. I followed this up with more questions and prompts in order to help the participant recall and report her thought processes at that instance. The data on lines 6 to 7 were labelled 'anticipation' as it seemed to illustrate the idea that the participants had as they started their Web search, 'We thought that the scientist we have to choose is different'. Lines 8 to 9 were seen as an illustration of an action that proceeded and coincided with starting the activity (entering 'scientists' into the search engine) and a link to what they said they thought about as a goal for entering 'scientist' into the search engine, 'so that we know a bigger group of scientists'. Lines 12 to 14 show an instance that initially received two possible codes as they illustrate a process of schema activation (topical background knowledge) and at the same time illustrates the influence of images being part of the webpage on what

information the participants decided to select. The coding of these three lines also shows how I was able to access multimodal material, i.e., through the responses of the participants in the stimulated recall interviews in which they reported their thought processes as they attended to multimodal cues, not the computer-based material itself.

Validity

One of these strategies that the current study implemented to achieve rigour and trustworthiness was the process of triangulation. As discussed in the previous section, by examining and converging evidence from multiple sources of information at different times in order to identify patterns and themes, data, and time triangulation contributed to enhance the qualitative validity in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is one key way of meeting the criterion described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as credibility. Another strategy used in this research to achieve rigour, or dependability to use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) term, was auditing trails of evidence. It has been suggested that to establish an audit trail, researchers need to provide a clear documentation of all research decisions and procedures (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This section and the previous two delineate the decisions and choices in this research concerning data collection and analysis.

Ethics

Because this research involved collecting data from people about people, ethical issues were anticipated to arise with regard to access and consent. Thus, informed consent was sought and gained from all student participants as well as from their teachers. Prior to data collection, I presented all necessary information about this research to gatekeepers, teachers and students in their L1, and then they were given the chance to decide whether to take part or not (as in Israel & Hay, 2006).

Multimodality components of the meaning-making process

In Class 1 the students were asked to use the Internet to find information about famous explorers and scientists. The results from Group 2 of Class 1 showed that encountering a specific term that the participants already knew marked the start of the meaning-making process. For instance, in Extract 1 (See Appendix A), the textual mode was the primary source of information and the verb 'establish' seemed to play the role of a sign for the answer. To illustrate, as shown in Extract 1, the word 'establish' made the participants think that they 'would find something about his achievements'. The participants' linguistic knowledge, 'we knew it [establish] was a verb', as well as the context of the text, helped them find the answer. That is, the participants linked the word 'establish' to achievements, since they had been asked to find out what the scientist had done that made him famous, and encountering 'establish' was followed by searching around it for what he achieved.

The text that the students were reading online appeared to have elements that the participants immediately understood (e.g., establish) and others that were yet to be processed. In going back and forth, as the extract illustrates, the participants were trying to fill the other elements of the text with meaning. It seemed that the meaning-making process in this extract was constructed based on (1) the participants' knowledge of that

text's context, 'his early life', and (2) the linguistic features they perceived from the cue 'establish', 'we knew it was a verb so it tells what he did'. Perceiving such linguistic features was aided by the participants' previous linguistic knowledge of 'establish', 'it was familiar … I came across it', and (3) on their search for more textual signs, 'going back and forth to find out what he did', which also helped them evaluate their own choices, 'to know if it was the sentence we needed or not'.

A similar meaning-making process is also found in Extract 2 (See Appendix A). The participants' familiarity with the verb 'develop' and their realisation that it was central to the overall meaning of the text ('"develop" was the word that made me think that it was what he did'), made them decide that the answer would be in or around that sentence. They then undertook a process of 'back and forth' reading in order to confirm their understanding of 'develop' and to establish the contextual meaning, 'to make sure that it was the right information and to know what the information was'. That process helped the participants obtain what they were looking for. As shown in Extract 2, in constructing the meaning of the text, the participants used a textual component, a verb which was familiar and perceived as a key element, as a starting point; then they established the overall meaning of the text by reading around that key element. However, the data also revealed that it was not only verbs that were involved in the processing of texts in that way. In Extract 3, the participants from Group 1 highlighted other central-to-meaning words, which included different content words.

The multimodality inherent to CALL environments also played an important role. Extract 4 (Appendix A) illustrates how the participants from Groups 1 and 8 of Class 1 used materials that provided them with texts and images simultaneously, in this case on the topic of 'Marie Curie'. The participants stated that images of Marie Curie stimulated their background knowledge and helped them remember some information about her. Before they started reading the text about Marie Curie, the participants already knew her name and what she had discovered, which is what the activity was mainly about.

In another group (Group 5, Class 3), participants studied materials that contained map images and text. Extract 5 (in Appendix A) shows that when the participants were asked to find general information about the destination that they chose, they started by looking at the map where their selected destination was located, and then they used information from a box next to the map. One student spotted general information listed in that box, and he drew the others' attention to it. That is, it seems that both image and text were used in a complementary way to help the participants make meaning of what was on the screen, and hence selected that information, as Extract 5 illustrates.

The data from Group 11 in Class 3 reveal that an image on a webpage could also play another role. While the previous extract from Group 5 shows that visuals within a text on a webpage supported overall comprehension, in Group 11 one participant stated that an image attracted his attention and made him read the accompanying text. As the participant stated, because he liked the image, he read the text associated with it and disregarded the other texts on that webpage, as shown in Extract 6.

Discussion

The findings described above show that one way the participants constructed meaning in the collaborative CALL environment was through a process that started by attending to

relevant textual or visual signs followed by a further action and then evaluation. The results showed that when the match between a cue in the collaborative CALL environment and the information being sought was confirmed, the information was obtained. When it was not confirmed, the process of meaning making started over again. That is, meaning making in the collaborative CALL environment is a process of attending to relevant signs, action and evaluation. While this finding confirms what was already identified in previous studies (e.g., Park & Kim, 2016; Thoms, 2014; Young et al, 2000; Zheng, Young, Wagner & Brewer, 2009), it delineates how exactly the process of meaning construction in the collaborative CALL environment was influenced by the multimodal nature of the activities. The study reveals that visual, textual and auditory cues in the collaborative CALL environment influenced the process of meaning making by activating the participants' prior knowledge and/or by aiding them to create links to their own interests. Within the collaborative CALL environment, meaning was constructed through a complex and self-regulated interactional process between the learners and their prior knowledge, interests, motivation, and language competence, and the language learning resources available, which included printed and electronic materials, the teacher and other learners. However, the participants' personal preferences also led participants to over-rely on a single mode to work with in the collaborative CALL activity, which could lead to missing aspects of the process of meaning-making when meaning is distributed across different modes.

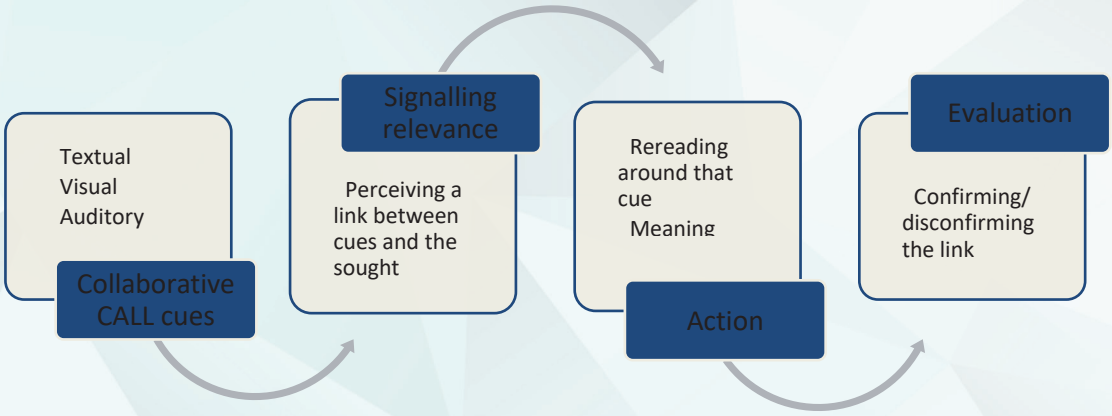

***Diagram 1**_A process of language emergence in multimodal CALL environment*

Diagram 1 shows a process of constructing affordances for authentic language use in which the participants used the resources available to them in the collaborative CALL environment. By constructing those language use affordances, the participants became involved in a process of meaning making that took them through signalling relevance, action and evaluation.

These elements of the meaning-making process can be induced in the collaborative CALL environment if the following techniques are employed by the language teacher and/or the collaborative CALL course designer. The following table presents some techniques that

have the potential to enhance the emergence of authentic language use based on the findings of this study.

Collaborative multimodal CALL environment	
Technique	**Implementation**
Make information freely available and easily accessed	● Using webpages that have embedded layers of other webpages ● Providing opportunities for collaboration and interaction via different channels.
Maintain the active role of learners	● Guiding the learners' perception of the goals of the activity ● Activating/building the learners background knowledge of the topic and of the technology used ● Knowing and utilizing the learners' interests, personal views and preferences about the topic.
Incorporate a variety of modes in which information is presented	● Incorporating multimodal materials in the design of the collaborative CALL activity ● Encouraging multimodal presentation of the outcomes (e.g., oral presentation that involves use of visuals). ● Involving face-to-face interaction as well as Web-based.
Structure flexible activity	● Flexible role allocation ● Allowing variations in how the collaborative CALL is performed.
Cater for the individual	● Attending to the individual learners' needs, preferences and learning styles ● Providing room for variations in activity outcomes ● Considering individual development in assessment of the overall learning.

***Table 2**_Techniques to foster language emergence in collaborative multimodal CALL environments for pedagogical implications*

Conclusion

In summary, the meaning-making process identified in this study provides an explanation of what language emergence in the collaborative CALL environment is and what facilitates it. Language emergence in the collaborative CALL environment was promoted by the construction of language learning affordances. These affordances were constructed by the interaction between the components of the identified meaning-making process, as presented in Diagram 1 above. The interaction between these components, which are components of the meaning-making process, can be viewed as part of the language development system that gives rise to language emergence in forms of authentic language use instances. The occurrence of such instances of language use can be fostered if the language learning activity is structured upon elements of multimodality.

**The study has been extracted from an unpublished PhD thesis for the same author:*

Al Saidi, F. (2018). *Language Emergence in Collaborative CALL Environments: An Investigation within*

Higher Education in Oman from a Complexity Theory and Noticing Hypothesis Perspective (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bath: UK).

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Appendix A

Extract 1

Group 2_Class 1

(R= Researcher/ A, B, C = student participants)

A: The word was there and we were not sure about it.
B: I think we saw it in the passage about his early life.
A: Yes yes, early life.
R: So what came into your mind when you saw the word 'establish'?
B: We would find something about his achievements.
B: And indeed it turned out to be one of his achievements. But I can't remember what it was now.
R: Good. So what did you do when you knew that?
A: We went back.
B: We went back to the beginning of the sentence to know if it was the sentence we needed or not.
B: And it was it indeed.
R: How did you know?
B: From the context of the sentence. It showed that it was something he achieved.
R: Did you know the meaning of 'establish'?
B: I sort of knew it.
A: it was familiar. I came across it.
B: We knew that it meant 'started' or 'designed' or 'founded'. We knew it was a verb so it tells what he did.
R: And was this what made you go back to the beginning of the passage?
A & B: Yes.

Extract 2

Group 2_Class 1

R: Right. But what made you [A] point at the screen. What did you see?
A: Because I knew she would not be able to see that.
B: No the information that made you point?
A: There was a word. I can't remember now. It meant that it was something he did.
B: 'Note'? No umm 'find out'.
A: Yes 'find out' I think. No No it was 'develop'
B: 'develop' yes
A: 'Develop' was the word that made me think that it was what he did.
R: What came into your mind when you read the word 'develop'?

A: When I read it, I felt it meant something that he made or changed, something like that.
R: Then you [B] read it out loud. What came into your mind at that moment?
B: I read it from the beginning to make sure that it was the right information and to know what the information was. When I read it I knew that it was the right information. He found out the theory of something.

Extract 3

Group 1_Class 1

A: We saw the main words we were looking for.
A: like his father, or anything like main words based on which we search.
B: It showed the date of birth and death
C: and discover
B: Yes and discover.
...
R: So these were clear on the screen?
B: Yes. And we were highlighting them in blue.

Extract 4

Group 1_Class 1

A: This was when I saw Marie Curie. I saw her name and I pointed at her saying this is what we will choose.
R: Why?
B: Because we know about her.
...
A: When we saw Marie Curie, we remembered her and what she explored and that her exploration was the reason for her fame. This was among the reasons we chose her.
B: She was the one that caught our attention among the others because we knew more about her.

Extract 5

Group 5_Class 3

B: There was something like general information ...
C: Yes there was like a box that had information about the city. So she was suggesting that we read what's in the box [not only look at the map].
R: What made you [B] suggest that?
B: Because they give us general information about the city like the economy, population, etc.
R: Where?
B: On Google maps itself.
R: Did you find what you were looking for?
B: Yes we did. We found some useful information.
C: Yes especially information about the weather of each city.

Extract 6

Group 11_ Class 3

R: Why did you choose this particular information?
C: Well I liked the image.
...
C: It was an image of someone on a scooter. It was clear that he was moving fast?
B: I think it was 95 K/h.
R: What were the other things on that page besides the scooter image?
C: Something about the motorcycles and bicycles.
R: You did not like any of those?
C: No. The scooter caught my attention.

Using Textbooks to Enhance Critical Thinking Teaching at General Foundation Programs in Higher Education Institutions

Maha Mohamed Abasaid

Abstract

Most of the Arab Gulf region's higher education institutions' strategic plans state, implicitly and explicitly, objectives related to critical thinking teaching. Despite that, there is disparity between such espoused beliefs and enacted practices, in terms of teaching the concept. The main reason for such disparity, in General Foundation Programs in higher education institutions, is the students' low English language proficiency. Such low proficiency is a common challenge for professors, as well as students.

To overcome such challenge, professors should adopt practical and simple strategies. Professors can utilize textbooks' critical thinking explicit and implicit themes to enhance the teaching of such a threshold concept. Textbooks' critical thinking implicit themes such as continuity, visual literacy and the collaborative modes to approach the learning-teaching activities would facilitate critical thinking teaching, despite inadequate English language proficiency. Furthermore, professors can employ such implicit themes to address the often-avoided critical thinking explicit themes in a constructivist learning environment.

Key words: challenges to critical thinking teaching, critical thinking, critical thinking implicit and explicit elements, textbooks

Contextual background

General Foundation Programs (GFPs), designed for the new students' intakes, are integral programs in higher education (HE) institutions in the Arab Gulf region. In addition to teaching English language, the GFPs teach IT and mathematics. Such programs aim to improve students' English linguistic proficiency before they join their specializations. It is important to note that English is the medium of instruction in the GFPs and in all scientific specializations in the Arab Gulf region's HE institutions. Accordingly, this stage of learning English language is challenging and demanding, thus acquiring critical thinking (CT) skills is not a priority for the GFPs' students.

The definition of critical thinking

CT is a controversial concept, with no consensus on its definition in literature and education research literature. For example, Petress (2004, p.1) defined the concept as "a pervasive academic literature term". To escape "this state of puzzlement", Moore (2013, p.508) explained that the concept should not be defined in a one-line definition or in isolation, as this could not help in the comprehension of its meaning. Moore (2013) affirmed that CT is better defined within the context of a certain discipline that would term its meaning.

In view of such controversy in relation to the definition of CT, Lai (2011) referred to many researchers such as Ennis, Facione and Halpern who are from different schools of thought like philosophy and education. Lai (2011, p.9) stated that despite such disagreements on a definition of CT, these scholars "agree on the specific abilities encompassed by the definition". Hence, CT is an umbrella term that is applied to different forms of learning styles and to approaches of thought processes. Lai (2011) affirmed the role of higher order of thinking skills such as analysing, evaluating, interpreting, synthesizing information and applying creative thoughts to form arguments, solve problems, or reach conclusions. Consequently, Lai (2011, p.8) referred to Bloom's taxonomy as means of information processing skills. when it comes "to teaching and assessing higher-order thinking skills".

Likewise, other scholars such as Adams (2015) and Athanassiou, McNett and Harvey (2003) related the importance of Bloom's taxonomy to CT teaching. In this view, Huitt (1998) stressed that CT is an integral part of higher order of thinking skills. The scholar referred to the importance of going through the six levels defined by Bloom, i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, to reflect the variation in the cognitive levels. In this context, Huitt (1998) described the higher levels of the taxonomy such as analysis and evaluation as the domains where CT enters.

Despite the different arguments on the definition of CT, there is conformity in the literature on the concept's positive academic, personal and professional impacts on individuals.

The multiple impacts of critical thinking

Attaining generic skills such as CT is one of the most important learning outcomes of HE (Stassen, Herrington & Henderson, 2011). This holds true of HE institutions' organizational culture in the Arab Gulf region. Evidently, acquiring CT is an integral part of higher education institutions written and unwritten attributes for different reasons. There is conformity in the literature on the concept's positive academic impacts on students. In their study, Ghazivakili, Nia, Panahi, Karimi, Gholsorkhi and Ahmadi (2014) stated that the learning styles and CT teaching are closely associated with the students' academic performance. Likewise, Nasrabadi's and Mousavi's (2012) study affirmed that the role of CT approaches and cognitive learning styles in the students' academic achievement is inevitable. In addition to achieving higher academic attainments, there are other vital impacts of CT teaching such as enhancing individuals' professional competencies and individuals' citizenries. Rotherham and Willingham (2010, p.17) defined CT and problem- solving as 21st century skills, emphasizing that such skills have been the "components of human progress throughout history". Both scholars recognized the concept within education and stressed that CT teaching and knowledge teaching are equally important, as both components are intertwined. In this view, Rotherham and Willingham (2010) urged education policy- makers to consider CT teaching and assessments to ensure the concept's attainability, despite the challenges.

Statement of the problem

Although CT is an integral concept in education, still it is in its infancy in the Arab and the Arab Gulf region, even among educators. Alazzi's (2008) study indicated that social

studies professors have little familiarity with the definition of and the teaching strategies related to CT. In the same context, Chouari (2016, p.461) referred to the paucity of literature on CT, in the Arab world, as a serious issue for a concept that is "preparing students for their future life". Such limitations, in terms of CT teaching, have a negative impact on students' academic performance. This was evident in the Arab Gulf states' students' poor performance, in general, in standardized international tests. Andreas Schleicher, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) chief statistician, described the attainment level of Arab Gulf states' students in the PISA tests as "deeply disturbing" (Plackett, 2014, p.1).

Scholars questioned the reasons behind such poor performance in global standardized testing, such as Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies (TIMSS) and the PISA. Taking Qatar as an example, Cheema (2014) referred to the inconsistency between the education reforms' high budgets and the students' low attainment in PISA and TIMSS. According to Smith and Szymanski (2013), one of the reasons for the low performance of students in standardized tests, is that such tests focus on higher order skills such as CT. In view of this, scholars in the region, such as Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012) and Al-Mahrooqi (2012) in Oman, criticized the pre-university education system, where the schools' syllabi are teacher- centred and are far from enhancing CT skills.

Generally, there is a misalignment between professors' espoused practices and enacted practices in terms of CT teaching. Polly and Hannafin (2011) gave reasons for this misalignment such as the unsupportive school environment to adopt reform-based instructional practices, lack of students' motivation and the control of didactic teaching. Such disparities, between theory and practice, in education are common (Flessner, 2014). In view of this, Ching (2014) referred to the importance of applying theories and principles, in a way, to show their relevance to classrooms' practices. Due to this fact, professors should adopt possible practical strategies to help them cope with such challenges.

The aim of the study

As a scholarly practitioner, I aimed in this study to touch on the world of academia and the world of practice (Hebert, 2010). I investigated CT teaching in my classrooms for restructuring or renewing the practice of the concept. In this context, I examined thoroughly the CT implicit and explicit elements in the textbooks that I use for teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) in the four level GFP at my workplace. I referred to these textbooks as the GFP textbooks, a pseudonym, as part of maintaining confidentiality.

Research question

I examined CT implicit and explicit elements in the GFP textbooks. I intended to draw the administrations, and particularly the professors' attention, to the existing CT implicit and explicit elements in the GFP textbooks. Such elements could be utilized and supplemented to improve CT teaching and practice, despite the language barrier, at the other GFPs, thereby enhancing the students' academic, personal and professional attainments. I crafted the following research question to help enhance CT teaching and practice in the GFP.

How can the CT implicit and explicit elements in the GFP textbooks foster teaching the concept?

Methodology

In this case study, I described the GFP textbooks without referring to the publisher or the textbooks' titles, as part of adhering to the ethical guidelines, thereby maintaining the confidentiality of this study. In view of this, I referred to the GFP textbooks as Textbook 1 and Textbook 2. I will elaborate on the GFP textbooks' description in the finding section.

I used Littlejohn's framework for analysing language teaching materials to investigate the CT implicit and explicit elements in the GFP textbooks. I relied on this framework, because it goes beyond giving a detailed description of textbooks. This framework "allows the material to speak for themselves" (Littlejohn, 2011, p.182). Such objectivity in the materials is achieved through two descriptive aspects; the first aspect is the publication, while the second one is the design of the materials (Littlejohn, 2011). I relied on the publication to identify the physical features of the GFP textbooks, as such features presented the materials as a complete set. I also identified the GFP textbooks' design to understand the thinking underlying such textbooks.

I identified the aspects related to the GFP textbooks' publication and design, such as the division, subdivision, continuity, sequencing and selection of the materials (Littlejohn, 2011). I relied on such aspects as they reflected CT implicit elements that are embedded in the GFP textbooks. In addition to that, the abovementioned aspects explained the characteristics, arrangements, connectedness and predetermined order of the physical features of the GFP textbooks. Furthermore, the GFP textbooks' publication and the design provide a detailed analysis of the materials that helps educators to utilize the materials to their maximum potentials (Littlejohn, 2011).

In view of this, Table 1 displays the seven aspects related to the GFP textbooks' publication and the nine aspects related to the design of the materials. It is important to have a deep understanding of the GFP textbooks as a complete set revealing CT implicit elements. Such understating of the textbooks and the CT implicit elements helps in enhancing CT teaching, especially in ESL classes, where the English language barrier is a major constraint.

To continue with the analysis of the GFP textbooks, I applied a thematic analysis developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) to code patterns and commonalities in the GFP textbooks. Such analysis helped me to construct two overarching themes that addressed the research questions. The first theme is CT explicit elements which are the unit's sequencing and the learning-teaching activities. The second theme is CT implicit elements which are visual literacy, continuity and learning-teaching activities.

Publication	Design
1. The position of the EFP textbooks 2. The published form of the EFP textbooks 3. Subdivision of the EFP textbooks into sections 4. Subdivision of sections into subsections 5. Continuity 6. Route 7. Access	1. Aims 2. Principles of selection 3. Principles of sequencing 4. Subject matter and focus of subject matter 5. Types of teaching/ learning activities 6. Participation 7. Learners role 8. Teachers role 9. Role of the material as a whole

Table 1: Aspects of the GFP textbooks' analysis

Findings:

The GFP textbooks' description

At each level of the GFP, students are assigned two textbooks to cover the four language skills in addition to CT. Textbook 1 covers reading, writing and critical thinking skills, whereas Textbook 2 covers listening, speaking and critical thinking skills. The GFP textbooks aim to introduce general English to the GFP students. Such textbooks' published form reflects the same form and layout. Each textbook is divided into ten units covering a variety of topics, following different academic paths using authentic, adapted and modified materials.

The GFP textbooks' units start with unit openers, listing the objectives of the unit. Also, on each unit's opening page, there are open- ended questions and general questions to encourage discussion. Likewise, different authentic visual cues, such as real situations photos and graphics are employed.

Also, it is important to note that the GFP four levels use the same textbooks' series for the four skills of English language. The series is designed to gradually elevate the GFP students' language proficiency from one level to the following one. Accordingly, there is a continuity and uniformity in the layout of the textbooks with a standard pattern in the design, size, typeface and the presentation of the content. Because of this consistent standardization along the GFP four levels textbooks, I analysed these textbooks' features collectively using a qualitative thematic analysis. I constructed two themes; the first theme is CT explicit elements and the second one is CT implicit elements. The coming sections report on the findings related to the GFP textbooks' CT explicit elements which are the unit's sequencing and the learning-teaching activities respectively.

The GFP textbooks' CT explicit element

The GFP textbooks' unit's sequencing

In terms of the GFP textbooks' unit's sequencing, there is a repeated pattern in Textbook 1 and Textbook 2 units' order, divisions and subdivisions across the GFP four levels (See Figures1 & 2). Textbook 1 units are divided into Lessons A, B and C, whereas Textbook

2 units are divided into Lessons A and B. In both textbooks, there is a gradual progression across the units' lessons. For example, Lessons A focus on concrete knowledge reflecting the lower categories of Bloom's taxonomy, where students are required to remember and understand facts. However, Lessons B require students to focus on the higher categories of Bloom's taxonomy, where such students show abstract knowledge by applying it to new situations or by analysing such situations. By the end of Lessons B, there are explicit CT tasks, where students are supposed to analyse, synthesize and critically evaluate ideas and information in the text. In the same context, Textbook 1 Lessons C focus on the highest category of Bloom's taxonomy which is creativity. At this level, the students are required to write an essay based on the unit's theme, where students should apply the new acquired language and voice their own views.

In both GFP textbooks, Lessons A end with pre-reading tasks for Lessons B. Lessons A are followed by a viewing task of authentic materials videos that are based on award-winning films' collections. These videos serve as content- bridges between Lessons A and Lessons B. Before starting Lessons B, students are required to use their CT skills to link the videos' contents to the previous reading texts in Lessons A as such videos consolidate the Lessons A contents.

The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities

The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities proceed from the lower levels of thinking skills to the higher ones, reflecting Blooms' taxonomy of learning domains (Forehand, 2010). For example, in both textbooks, under Lessons A (See Figures1 & 2), students are required to apply the factual levels of Blooms' taxonomy which are knowledge and comprehension. However, in Lessons B, students move to higher levels of thinking skills. In such lessons, students are required to apply higher orders of thinking skills such as, analysis, synthesis and evaluation to a higher set of activities. Moreover, in both textbooks, the final questions require the students to evaluate arguments based on the lessons' contents. In such arguments, students give examples from their own experience, and they attempt to apply the new vocabularies to their discussions.

Moreover, the GFP textbooks' Lessons A include ten high-frequency vocabularies and exercises so that students practice and expand the vocabularies and listening activities under formal conversations. Based on the units' themes and on Lessons A, there are explicit CT learning-teaching activities at the end of each unit. Based on the units' themes, students perform collaborative speaking activities in pairs or groups.

Besides the above mentioned GFP textbooks' CT explicit elements, there are other CT implicit elements in the GFP teaching materials. The following sections report on the GFP textbooks' CT implicit elements which are visual literacy, continuity and learning-teaching activities.

The GFP textbooks' CT implicit elements

Visual literacy

One of the repeated physical features in the GFP textbooks is the extensive use of images and audio-visuals such as, real situations photos and award- winning videos respectively

(See Figures 1&2). Also, authentic charts such as, maps and graphics are other dominant features across the GFP's four levels textbooks. The use of visual imagery helps the students to get connected with the materials, rather than depending on text-based textbooks. Such images and audio-visuals are used as one of the ways of introducing students to academic contents in English. For example, the GFP textbooks' units start with visual introductions that introduce the learners to the units' themes, through discussions and application of CT skills. Such visual introductions are based on authentic images that connect the students to the real world. Also, the GFP textbooks' authentic images and videos help students address the different categories of Bloom's taxonomy.

Continuity within and across the GFP textbooks

The GFP textbooks' materials' selection is a technique of maintaining such textbooks' continuity. For example, the GFP textbooks' topics are selected to reflect a variety of contemporary issues from different academic tracks. This selection reveals similar academic tracks, such as psychology, science and economics in both of the GFP textbooks within the same level and across the GFP four levels. Furthermore, such selection of academic tracks addresses the GFP students' interests and meets their needs. Also, the GFP textbooks' selected materials touch on controversial issues such as human migration, the impact of urbanization and gender roles, thereby reflecting the abovementioned academic tracks. Such controversy requires students to express their various points of view and to approach the materials critically.

The units' contents reflect the continuity across the GFP textbooks, as they discuss the same themes. However, such themes are presented from different perspectives in each level and skill. In addition to that, the GFP textbooks' continuity is maintained through the topics, similar key vocabularies and predetermined order of units' tasks in each textbook. Such pattern is followed to maintain continuity across the four levels of the GFP textbooks.

The GFP textbooks' learning- teaching activities

The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities are student-centred activities that are built on recycled themes, previous activities and students' prior knowledge. In view of such activities, Littlejohn (2011) referred to the importance of examining other aspects simultaneously. The scholar defined such aspects as the learners' role, the collaborative modes of participation and the professors' role.

As for the learners' role, the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities require students to reflect elements of "process competence" (Littlejohn, 2011, p.184). Hence, students depend on the various domains of knowledge they acquired through the units' themes and different academic tracks to approach the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities. Moreover, such activities require students to interpret, deduce and express meanings using their writing, reading, listening and speaking skills. Consequently, the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities require active learning environments that necessitate students to work in pairs or groups collaboratively in the class.

Tigelaar, Dolmans, Wolfhagen, and Van Der Vleuten (2004) argued that such type of activities requires adequate teaching competencies, where professors act as facilitator. As

facilitators, such professors are expected to build constructivist classes, where there is a mutual learning environment between the professors and the learners, and among the learners themselves (Bada & Olusegun, 2015).

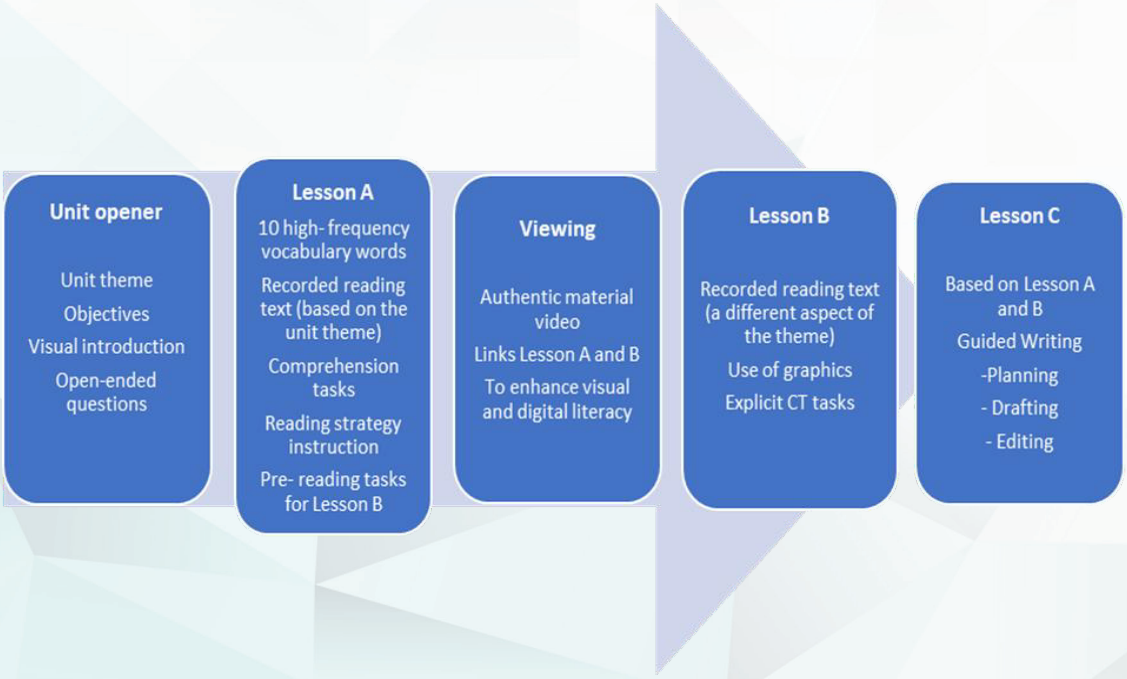

Figure 1: Textbook 1: Units' divisions and sequencing

Figure 2: Textbook 2: Units' divisions and sequencing

Discussion

In this section, I present the arrangements of the physical aspects and the design of the materials that, per se, enhance CT teaching. I relied on these features to construct explicit and implicit themes that can foster CT teaching in the GFP classes. Hereunder, I discuss the GFP textbooks' CT explicit themes which are the materials' sequencing and the learning-teaching activities.

The GFP textbooks' CT explicit elements

The GFP textbooks' units' sequencing

The GFP textbooks' units' sequencing reflects a consistent logical progression, following Bloom's taxonomy, across the teaching materials (See Figures1&2). This sequencing helps the learners to build up their language and learning-teaching activities, which depend on the previous activities and the learners' prior knowledge.

The GFP textbooks' sequencing is akin to Numrich's sequence of CT tasks (Beaumont, 2010). Numrich's sequence is a framework to sequence CT tasks. Beaumont (2010) commended Numrich's sequence, because it fits well ESL classes as it sequences CT tasks to be practiced at any language proficiency level (Beaumont, 2010). Like Numrich's sequence, the GFP textbooks' activities can be grouped into three categories. The first category is pre- reading or pre- listening tasks such as the unit openers and new vocabularies in the GFP textbooks' Lessons A and Lessons B. The second category implies tasks focusing on the texts or the listening tracks such as the GFP textbooks' Lessons B. The third category relates to completing the main texts or listening tracks. Beaumont (2010, p.2) stated that one of the advantages of textbooks' sequencing is to "point students in directions they might not immediately see on their own".

Evidently, the GFP textbooks' sequencing motivates the students by gradually increasing the level of challenges linked to CT tasks. Such sequencing reflects Bloom's taxonomy's six levels within the cognitive domain, where each one is related to a different level of cognitive ability (Duron, Limbach & Waugh, 2006). For instance, this sequencing in the GFP textbooks' Lessons A reflects tasks that require learners to address the lower categories of the taxonomy, such as knowledge and application. The sequencing in the GFP textbooks' Lessons B demands the learners to ascend, in stages, to the higher levels which are analysis, synthesis and evaluation (See Figures 1& 2). Duron et al. (2006) affirmed that at such advanced levels, that require more thinking, CT teaching takes place. Adams (2015) stressed the importance of these higher levels of the taxonomy to CT teaching. Samson (2016) referred to the results of Deal's and Pittman's study, where both scholars concluded that purposeful instructions, student-centred approaches and diverse learning activities enhanced students' CT skills.

The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities

Each lesson, in the GFP textbooks, ends in explicit CT activities that require students' collaborative approaches. Nelson (1994) stated that such approaches can circumvent the complexity of CT teaching, in addition to the enthusiasm with which the students embrace their collaborative participations.

In both textbooks (See Figures1&2) there are learning-teaching activities that explicitly require students to employ CT skills. Hence, students must apply higher orders of thinking skills which are analysing, synthesizing and evaluating. Evidently, such activities' goal of instructions is not to test the learners' factual knowledge, but rather to ensure that these learners can elaborate on and interpret such knowledge. Moreover, relying on a gradual upward movement to the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy can help the GFP students address such activities critically as has been affirmed by Adams (2015) and Forehand (2010).

In view of this, Brookfield (2013) underscored the necessity of explicitly teaching CT instructions to enhance teaching such threshold concept. The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities are based on authentic texts and they require open-ended conversations. Parrish (2006) referred to such aspects as criteria to enhance freedom of expression and acceptance of diversity. Such activities enhance one of the impacts of CT teaching in terms of civic education.

Evidently, the GFP textbooks' sequencing and the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities can explicitly enhance CT teaching. Moreover, there are other aspects in such textbooks that implicitly foster CT teaching which are the GFP textbooks' continuity, visual literacy and learning- teaching activities.

The GFP textbooks CT implicit elements

The GFP textbooks' continuity

The continuity throughout the GFP textbooks' units enhances the students' prior learning and builds new learning simultaneously. Zwaagstra (2016) underlined the importance of knowledge and the exposure to different subjects as essential criteria for CT teaching. Also, Maudsley and Strivens (2000) referred to the role of prior knowledge and lessons from contemporary education to explicitly foster CT skills. Hence, adhering to the same academic tracks within ten units, over four semesters, maintains continuity in the teaching materials. Moreover, following the same academic tracks widens the students' scope and develops their familiarization with the area of knowledge. Such continuity within the GFP textbooks contributes to enriching the students' knowledge and, thus, fosters CT teaching (Zwaagstra, 2016).

The GFP textbook's visual literacy

One of the examples of visual literacy in the GFP textbooks is unit openers. Each unit in the GFP textbooks starts with a unit opener, where there are visual introductions and open- ended questions (See Figures1 & 2). The authentic images and the related open-ended questions motivate students to participate, particularly in ESL classes (Wright, 1989). In addition to the unit openers, the different authentic visual cues throughout the units are used to help GFP students predict the contents of the units and think critically. The images and the open-ended questions in each unit elevate the students to higher orders of thinking skills. Housen (2002, p.101) stated that such elevation across the units creates a "critical thinking studio".

Several studies confirmed the effect of visual literacy on enhancing CT and communication skills, such as Sarmiento Sierra's (2010) study in Columbia. This study showed that images helped the students to develop their CT skills, express themselves in

Spanish and use English vocabulary. Another example of the effectiveness of visual literacy is in Housen's (2002) five-year study. Housen (2002) based his study on Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) curriculum. The scholar proved that images produce growth in evidentiary reasoning. Housen (2002) added that images effortlessly trigger a discussion that can enhance CT. Visual literacy enhances CT teaching, when there are limited verbal skills. Hence, professors can integrate visual literacy in their classes as it enhances CT teaching, despite students' low language proficiency. Emmison and Smith (2000) described images as crucial instruments to develop CT, because they represent ideas through multiple layers of meanings.

Evidently, visual literacy can extend students' intellect to the achievement of higher orders of thinking skills. Arneson and Offerdahl (2018) developed the Visualization Blooming Tool (VBT). It is an adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy, where it focuses on visual representations. Such tool makes visual learning skills more explicit in instruction and it helps students to interpret images, create visual representations and develop a better understanding of the skills needed.

In the same context, Tillmann (2012) stated that the incorporation of visual literacy into instructions aligns with Bloom's Taxonomy. Tillmann (2012) added that such instructions can move beyond reading visuals, as they can analyse, interpret and assign new meanings to the images. Thus, visual literacy can address the "step up in Bloom's Taxonomy of higher order thinking" (Tillmann, 2012, p. 15).

The GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities

The GFP textbooks' learning- teaching activities are student- centred ones, that require students to collaborate in pairs or groups. In this view, Gokhale (1995) stated that collaborative learning is emphasized in HE literature, not only for increasing interest among the students, but also for fostering CT skills. Gokhale (1995) affirmed that, based on evidence, collaborative learners perform better at higher levels of thoughts and retain information longer than those working individually. Johnson (1991), stressed previously the role of collaborative learning in enhancing professional competencies, citizenship and CT skills.

Other aspects related to the GFP textbooks' learning- teaching activities, such as the students' role, the mode of participation and the professors' role foster CT teaching implicitly. As for the students, the GFP textbooks' sequencing of the activities elevates them gradually to the higher categories of Blooms' Taxonomy. In Textbook 1, the activities from Lessons A to the ones in Lessons B and C represent the transitional ascent from the lower order of thinking skills to the higher ones (See Figure 1) (Revised Blooms' Taxonomy, n.d). In Lessons A, the activities require the students to identify the meanings of ten words in the reading text and use them throughout the lesson. Also, there are other activities in the units that require students to recall, predict, infer and conclude information. In comparison with Bloom's Taxonomy, such activities in Lessons A fall in the lower categories of the taxonomy. Lessons B and C, in Textbook 1, explicitly require higher order of thinking skills. Such activities explicitly require higher order of thinking skills, such as analysing, synthesizing and critically evaluating ideas and information in the reading texts.

Moreover, the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities require students to show a collaborative mode of participation. Such students' collaboration helps them to enhance their CT skills by improving their abilities to evaluate, analyse, and synthesize information from a wide range of sources in the textbooks. Based on his study, Gokhale (1995, p.30) concluded that "collaborative learning fosters the development of critical thinking through discussion, clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas". For students, to be able to approach such activities, they need their professors to act as facilitators in classes. In this view, the GFP textbooks' student-centred approaches and students' collaborative participation modes model the professors' role as facilitators.

Tigelaar et al. (2004) stated that professors should have less authority in classes and give the lead to the students. In their capacity as facilitators, professors are expected to help their students, who work collaboratively, without interventions. By being facilitators, professors' role is to scaffold their students to achieve the objectives of the GFP textbooks' learning- teaching activities. Hmelo-Silver and Barrows (2006) agreed that collaborative learning- teaching activities require the professors to act as facilitators. Therefore, professors are expected to guide their students and to enhance the construction of knowledge, rather than providing it (Tigelarr et al., 2004).

Topolovcan and Matijevic (2017) stated that teaching CT cannot develop in teacher-centred classes. Hence, professors should establish a constructivist learning environment. Kwan and Wong (2015) affirmed that such environment has a direct effect on fostering CT teaching. In this context, professors should consider applying constructivism as a learning theory to facilitate teaching CT. Such theory can fit well with CT teaching, because its principles focus on knowledge and the students' active role (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002). Moreover, constructivism urges students to construct and reconstruct knowledge, because such approach fosters CT teaching as students act as active, social and creative learners as has been stated by Perkins (2006).

Conclusion and implications

The GFP textbooks' implicit elements and explicit elements and the learning- teaching activities' arrangements help students to cover all of Bloom's Taxonomy cognitive levels. Thus, such arrangements help the students to build up from the lower levels of cognitive skills to higher ones. Hence, students are involved in higher skills such as analysing and evaluating. In view of this, several scholars such as Athanassiou et al. (2003) and Huitt (1998) affirmed the importance of the Bloom's taxonomy's higher order thinking skills as essential categories for CT teaching. To reinforce such importance, Adams (2015, p.152) stated that when students move to the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy, "here is where the skills that we commonly think of as critical thinking enter".

In view of this, this research's pedagogical implications can bridge the gap between research and practice in ESL classes. The findings reported on the GFP textbooks present such textbooks as a pedagogic device that enhance the learning of a foreign language (Littlejohn, 2011). Such findings would help professors, to direct their classes in accordance with their GFP students' language proficiency levels.

Referring to this study's findings, professors could employ the above stated GFP textbooks' CT implicit themes to foster the teaching of the concept in a constructivist

learning environment. For instance, such aspects of maintaining continuity as relying on prior knowledge and contemporary education topics implicitly fosters CT teaching, as has been advised by Maudsley and Strivens (2000).

Likewise, the GFP textbooks' visual literacy would cultivate CT teaching in the GFP classes, where the language barrier hinders such process. The GFP textbooks extensively rely on unit-openers, authentic images and award-winning videos that develop students' CT skills. Several studies proved that images produce growth in evidentiary reasoning, as they can enhance discussions and collaborations when verbal skills are limited.

In the same context, the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities are student- centred activities that require students to collaborate. Collaboration modes in the GFP classes implicitly foster CT teaching. Johnson (1991) referred to collaborative learning as an approach that would enhance professional competencies, citizenships and CT skills in classes.

In view of the GFP textbooks' learning-teaching activities, constructivist principles are applied to the learning-teaching process to approach such activities. Consequently, such constructivist approach in ESL classes would implicitly foster CT teaching, as Topolovčan and Matijević (2017) stated that this concept is the most significant feature of constructivist learning.

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The Potential of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle on Long Term Knowledge Retention

Anita Teresa Boggu

Abstract

Language learning is a complex and multi-faceted process where exploration of learner variables never ends. The search for an educational method or approach that engages and equips learners with employability skills steered the researcher towards Kolb's experiential learning theory. This research investigates the influence of Kolb's experiential learning cycle on knowledge retention among Omani students at the tertiary level. Eleven tasks were designed based on Kolb's four modes of the learning cycle. Retention of knowledge was calculated from data collected from a pre-test at the beginning of the semester and a delayed post-test three months after the end of the semester. Despite the gap of 90 days after the intervention, the results showed a statistically significant difference in knowledge retention between the experimental and the control group. An in-depth analysis revealed that the two groups differed in the rate of procedural knowledge retention compared to declarative knowledge.

Keywords: Experiential learning theory; Knowledge retention; long term: Kolb's learning cycle; learning modes;

1. Introduction

Language acquisition is an increasingly important area in applied linguistics whether it is first/second language or foreign language. Researchers have proposed, reviewed, criticized, and conceptualized numerous learning theories and methods on how a learner acquires a language or how the learner should be taught. It is essential to recognize that there is no 'one- size- fits all'- approach to teaching and learning. Learning a target language requires the learner to be immersed and surrounded by language in a way that they are compelled to use the language to survive in an English language classroom. This is not the case in Oman where English is the sole official foreign language.

With regards to the status of English taught in Omani schools, Al-Issa, (2007) states that 'English is considered as another fact-based school subject to memorize and pass and is characterized as textbook-based, production-oriented and teacher-centered'. (Al-Sadi, 2015) cites the opinion of Goodliffe (2005),'s that there is an overemphasis on the product than the learning process, in other words, teaching is exam-oriented. Goodliffe further comments that greater number of Omani students who enroll in higher education institutions have come from a milieu of teacher centred instruction and exhibit skills in rote learning. Al-Sadi (2015) cites that Mahmoud and Al-Mahrooqi (2012) are of the opinion that the reason for the low proficiency of graduates exiting from schools is due to insufficient opportunities for communicative practice and the poor quality of teaching methods. While most of the researchers contend that the teachers are responsible for the disappointing state of English language in Oman, Al-Alawi (1994, cited in Al-Issa, 2006a) critiques the ''curriculum'' as being ''authoritative'' following a ''top-down

mode'' which restrains the teacher to engage in any communicative or innovative methods.

Pankaj Khimji, Partner Director at Khimji Ramdas, was quoted by Times of Oman (25 March 2018), saying 'Oman needs to re-address its education and technical education platform, and adapt to skill-based education rather than vocational education'. It is evident that the current educational system does not prepare students to face the demands of the job market. Despite the numbers of years that students spend in learning the language or mastering discipline specific content, why is it that most of them fail to transfer the knowledge gained to real life scenarios? Does the 'top down mode' of curriculum result in superficial learning? If so, what can be done to ensure that deep learning takes place? Reflection on the stated questions led the researcher to investigate the type of knowledge that students retain for a longer duration. For the purpose of this study, Kolb's experiential learning cycle was adopted in designing tasks.

2. Theoretical foundations

English in Oman

English had gained importance since 1970 when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said ascended the throne. A case study conducted in Oman by WHO (Al-Issa, 2006b) reveals that English is learned for continuing post-secondary education, to understand business dealings, achievement in science and technology, travelling and cultural analysis and to find an executive job. English has been given the status of the sole official foreign language in the country. English is a part of the curriculum in private and public schools. Initially, English was taught from grade 4 onwards during the period from 1970 to 1998. The following year, a new program called Basic Education began, and since then English has been taught from grade one onwards (Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). Arabic is the medium of instruction in public schools, with one period per day timetabled for an English language class.

The academic requirement for entry into higher education institutions is the General Education Diploma Certificate. Babrakzai (2001, cited in Al-Issa, 2006a) is of the view that students seeking entrance to Higher education institutions possess insufficient functional English.

Pedagogical Practices in Oman

Oman is a hospitable country that is home to many expatriate workers. Expatriates occupy a significant portion of jobs in the private and public sectors. Due to this, defining or differentiating the teaching methods is a complex issue due to the diversity in teaching faculty. In schools, before Omanisation took over, there were teachers from Egypt, Sudan, India, Pakistan, Jordon, and Lebanon apart from the Omani staff. In the higher education sector, the majority belongs to the Philippines, the UK, America, India, Pakistan, Sudan, and Egypt. So it can be said, that a ''mixed-methodology' exists in teaching in both education sectors (MoE, and MoHE). Even after 30 years of introducing English language teaching system in Oman, graduates are still not proficient in the target language. This has proved to be a hindrance to the development of the country (A. Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa, 2012). An effort to upgrade the educational system was evident with the introduction of the Basic Education System in 1999, fading out the then existing General Education System (Al-Bulushi, 2012). The new BES curriculum intended to develop competent users of the English. Al-Bulushi investigated the success of this programme through an

online questionnaire targeting 141 SQU (Sultan Qaboos University) students who had graduated the BES curriculum. The findings revealed that,

'teachers have been disturbing the implementation of the BES through failing to use educational technological aids in teaching, teaching English through Arabic, encouraging memorization of language lexical and grammatical items, encouraging copying, asking students to memorize lexical and structural items, confining teaching the language to the textbook and training students for exam purposes'

These practices clearly indicate that teachers lack awareness of appropriate teaching methods or are not adequately qualified (Al-Bulushi, 2012). Al Abri et al. (2017) attribute poor language competency to the textbook that was used in the 1980s, (OWTE) 'Our World Through English 'which displayed a controlled form of language activities, which the teachers followed religiously. This was one of the possible reasons for the failure of developing students' communicative skills. Al-Bulushi & Al-Issa (2012) mention that despite providing teacher training programmes, teachers continue to teach traditionally, they lack the ability to reflect on their teaching practices and are not sensitive to the student's language needs. It is apparent that the English language teaching system in Oman implicitly encourages memorization which leads to surface knowledge that fades away with time. Graduates inability to transfer knowledge and skills gained to the job market indicates a gap between instructions and the functional language outcomes. Therefore, an investigation into factors that would promote long lasting retention of content is a vital aspect for English language teachers.

In this study, Kolbs experiential learning cycle was adopted as a framework to develop tasks that would make learners aware of the leaning process. According to him, the experiential theory of learning and development provides a holistic learning process which is apt for adult learners (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb's experiential learning theory

'Learning is the process of creating knowledge'. David Kolb's experiential learning theory draws knowledge from eminent scholars such as Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget. Kolb defines experiential learning theory as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience*'*. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience Kolb & Kolb, 2009).The distinct features of Kolb's experiential learning cycle is the introspective stage within the learning cycle. The ELT (Experiential Learning Theory) model consists of four modes of the cyclic learning process. The first mode of learning is the CE (Concrete experience), where 'here and now's experiences are provided to the learner, the second stage is RO (Reflective Observation), where the learner observes the effects of the experience, then uses that data to draw inferences to create new concepts, AC (Abstract Conceptualization).Eventually, the concepts are put into practice in the AE (Active Experimentation) mode of the learning cycle (D. A. Kolb, 1984). The four modes of the learning cycle are useful when the learner passes through all the stages of the cycle. Experience is transformed into meaningful learning enriched by reflection. This view is supported by Kohonen (1992) who writes that experience in isolation is not effective, it has to be analyzed and reflected upon to obtain the maximum benefit.

In the experiential learning theory, two forms of knowledge are manifested in the learning cycle, that is the social knowledge and personal knowledge, which the learner inherits

from experience. The significance of the cognitive aspect of experiential learning is emphasized by Kolb & Kolb (2009). Learning is effective when learners develop meta-cognitive strategies and gain confidence in the learning process. Knowledge retention is related to the mental processes, namely cognition and metacognition.Inclusion of these strategies in the pre-determined syllabus taught by the English language lecturers in Oman would aid deeper learning and eventually facilitate long term retention of the content.

Schunk (1991) reiterates that cognitive theorists consider learning as an internal mental aspect that processes information and forms mental structures leading to the acquisition of knowledge. Schunk further adds that the fundamental idea in the mental processing of information is retrieval or non-retrieval from memory'.

The second dominant concept of learning is that of the behaviourists who stress that the teacher is responsible for setting the learning environment to facilitate appropriate response to stimuli. Considering both the cognitive and behaviorists views, what is evident is that the teachers should consider the learner's perceptions and their learning environment to ensure that meaningful learning occurs. There are myriad learning theories that lay stress on memory or neurological conditions of the brain in processing information. While behaviourists give importance to stimuli-response theory, cognitivists focus on mental structures. Theories on information processing associate learning to the storage of knowledge in the memory in a systematic and meaningful order. The inability to retrieve the stored knowledge is termed as forgetfulness. Behaviourist theory stresses the importance of reinforcement to strengthen the memory to retrieve the information, while cognitivist theorists support the idea that learning becomes meaningful when the learners are able to organise and relate to the materials (Schunk, 1991).

David Kolb and Schunk, emphasize that cognitive processes should be considered when instruction and learning experiences are set up by the instructor. There are no pedagogical guidlines that warrant knowledge retention, However teachers can identify types of knowledge that students would remember for a longer period of time.

Types of knowledge

There are several types of knowledge based on theories that combine the influence of stimuli, environment, and cognition. (de Jong & Ferguson-Hessler, 1996) lists some types of knowledge as, generic and domain-specific knowledge, concrete and abstract knowledge, formal and informal knowledge, declarative and proceduralised knowledge, conceptual and procedural knowledge, elaborated and compiled knowledge, structured and unstructured knowledge, tacit or inert knowledge, knowledge acquisition knowledge, situated knowledge, and meta-knowledge. Domain-specific knowledge is defined by Alexander & Judy (1988) as declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge or conditional knowledge. Knowledge of factual information is declarative, a collation of the facts into purposeful and meaningful units is procedural knowledge and understanding the right time to utilize specific facts is conditional knowledge. Kohonen, (1992) identifies a strain between the declarative and the procedural knowledge. Presenting facts (‘know-that’) leads to (‘know-how’), which states that declarative knowledge is automatized to procedural knowledge.

Understanding the different types of knowledge has educational implications. It permits the teacher to make decisions while planning instructional activities. Perkins (1999) proposes five types of knowledge, namely, inert knowledge- knowledge that the learner rarely uses, ritual knowledge- where the learner uses the knowledge mechanically but does not know the reason for doing so, conceptually difficult knowledge- the student finds it difficult to match instructions given to them with what they already know, foreign knowledge – similar to the previous knowledge, student is unable to understand the purpose of using the knowledge and finally tacit knowledge- knowledge that is used unconsciously (Payne, 2005). Flavell (1979, cited in Kolb & Kolb, 2009) makes four distinctions of metacognition. They are metacognitive knowledge, experience, goals, and strategies. He further subdivides them into three categories, for instance, "knowledge of person variables, task variables, and strategy variables''. The first subcategory as the name indicates is the knowledge of how knowledge is learned and processed by humans and knowledge of one's learning process. Knowledge of the task requirements is the task variable, and knowledge on the ways to develop and use appropriate learning strategies is strategy variable. While most of the researchers focus on mental structures and information - processing aspects of the mind,,(Van Lier, (2007)opposes the view that the learner should be considered as a whole person and not just focus on the brain as the computer that receives information to process. The learner is a social being surrounded by worldly demands of the target language.

Kohonen (1992) explains the information processing aspect that takes place in the experiential learning cycle. He mentions that through continuous recycling of the input data, learning becomes meaningful and the learner becomes accustomed to the process. This would develop competent second language users who are capable of dealing with complex language issues. Kohonen explains information data processing using Kolb's experiential learning cycle, illustrated in the diagram below.

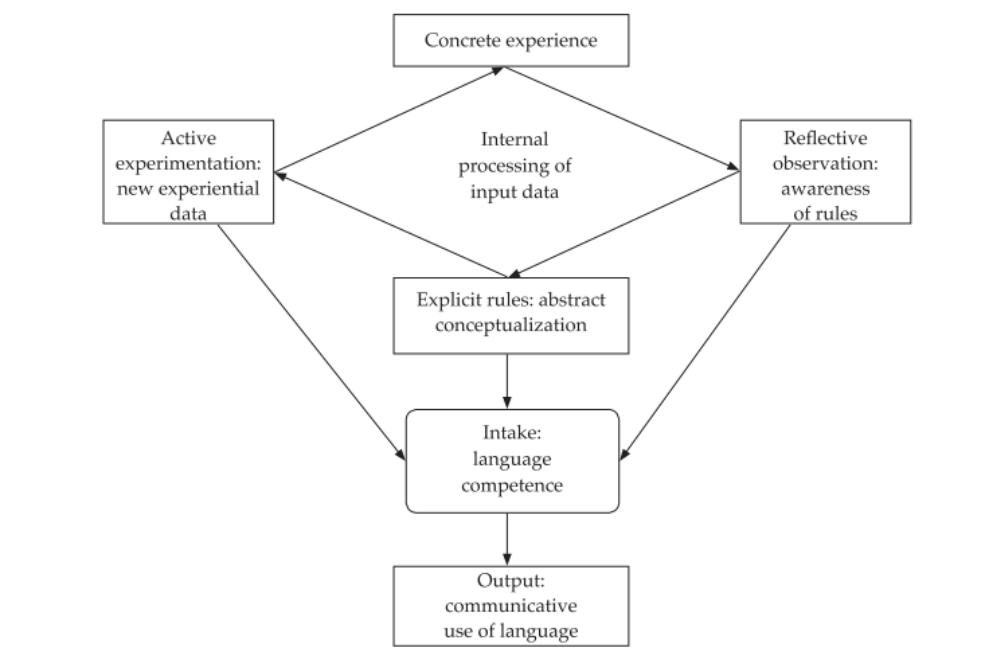

Figure 1- Experiential second language learning: a model (V Kohonen, 1992)

The four modes of the cyclic process are observed in the figure.1 According to the given model, explicit rules, void of appropriate experiential elements result in surface learning, experiences that are not reflected upon are redundant and do not yield proper learning. Reflections must test the new experiential data in the active mode of the learning cycle. As stated earlier by Kohenen, the ‘’know-that’’ (declarative knowledge) gradually leads to “know-how procedural knowledge if the input data is recycled, increasing to the learner's second language competence.’’ Experiential learning exists when a personally responsible, participant cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally processes knowledge, skills, and attitudes in a learning situation characterized by a high level of active involvement” (Hoover & Whitehead, 1975 25) cited in (Payne, 2005). As illustrated by Kohonen in figure 1, all four modes of the experiential cycle create a flexible learning environment for active involvement of the learner. Payne restates the significance of experiential learning in enhancing active engagement of the learner. The instructor commits himself to “learning by doing’’ by choosing to use experiential learning, which ensures holistic development of the learner (Payne, 2005).

Throughout the discussion on the types of knowledge, cognition has been the most talked about. Several researchers in their explanations of knowledge retention have reiterated the central theme of learning and strategies. ‘It is the learners who manage their learning about learning and take control of their learning process through meta-cognitive monitoring and control’ (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants for this study were chosen using the purposive sampling technique based on convenience and accessibility. A total of 62 Omani students participated in this study. It was a mix of male and female students aged between 20- 23. All the participants belonged to 7 different pathways on the Business Management Department, General Pathway, Human Resource Management, Marketing, Accounting, Information Systems, Small Business, and Tourism Pathway. The module that was taught to the students was Professional Skills Module at Level 5. This was a level which allowed students to complete the specified modules and exit with a Diploma or continue to a Bachelor's degree. The pre-requisite of the Professional Skills Module was the completion of two English modules in the previous level.

A week after students registered for the course, the researcher (non-Arabic speaker) accompanied by an Omani lecturer visited the classes to brief students on the aim of the study and confirmed the confidentiality of their responses.

Although students at this level were expected to be fluent in their language skills, the researcher took the support of the Omani lecturer to make students feel at ease with their participation in the study. A few expatriate students who belonged to the same group participated in all activites; however, their response was not included in the analysis order to avoid the effect of extraneous variables on the results of the study.

3.2 Design of the study

The present study employed an experimental design. The intervention was carried out in three stages, namely; pre-test, treatment and (delayed) post-test.

3.3 Data collection instruments

In order to determine the effect of the treatment on the samples, a pre-test and a post test was- designed. The test contained 4 sections with 5 items each. The first 2 sections were questions based on factual information (declarative knowledge) and sections 3 and 4 tested the student's procedural knowledge. The test was validated by four senior faculty members and piloted with a groups of students from a different programme of study. 11 tasks were planned for 14 teaching weeks, with each lesson lasting for 120 minutes, so two lessons per week.

A reflective journal activity was included during the 'reflective observation' stage of the experiential learning cycle. The reflective journal sheets consisted of 5 questions asking students to reflect on their experiences each week on tasks that worked best for them, the challenges they faced, a remedial plan to overcome their challenges and reflect on the application of knowledge gained to real life situations.

3.4 Research questions

The study aimed to investigate the following questions:

- What is the impact of experiential learning cycle on long term knowledge retention?
- Which type of knowledge is retained after a duration of 3 months. Is it Procedural knowledge or Declarative knowledge?

3.5 Description of the Procedure

A total of 62 students were divided into two distinct groups as experimental and control group. Each group contained 31 students. The groups have not been randomly assigned due to logistical restraints. The first week was an orientation week, so the pre-test was given to both the groups in teaching week 2. The pre-test was administered to determine prior knowledge of the course content. The treatment was provided to the experimental group for a period of 14 weeks. It included 11 experiential tasks that were designed to guide the learner through the four stages of the experimental learning cycle. Students reflected and recorded their progress in learning journals. The journals were not marked so as to provide students the freedom to express their views without any inhibitions. Based on the requirement of the activity, tasks were carried out either in groups, pairs or individually. Except for the alteration in the delivery of the module for the experimental group, both groups received the same course materials and attempted the same type of assessments.

The delayed post-test was administered 3 months later to both the groups to measure the effect of the intervention.

An example of an activity designed around the experiential learning cycle framework is illustrated below in table 1:

Topic: Business Report Preparation

Sub Skill: Thematic comparison of companies using SWOT

Learning Outcome: To enable students to compare and contrast between two companies.

Table 1- Class activity

Experiential Learning Cycle	Task Description
Concrete Experience	Teacher distributes SWOT case studies on Mac Donald's/KFC, Samsung/ Apple, and Starbucks/ Costa Coffee. This activity was arranged like a jigsaw-reading task so that all members of a group are active participants. Each group was given 2 case studies, for example, Mac Donald's/KFC; text cut into four pieces with each member of the group with one piece of the text. The teacher timed the reading activity and then allowed students to share their information. Students were familiar with Mac Donald's/KFC, Samsung/ Apple, and Starbucks/ Costa Coffee, so they were defending some weaknesses of the company. This led to a discussion on Junk food where they related it to their prior experiences. Later they spoke about their favourite electronic brands. The task was authentic, and students participated in the discussions without any inhibitions as every student had the experience to share.
Reflective observation	The teacher took the role of the subject expert and explained to students on comparative writing in business reports. Students already had two texts with them, so they were directed to compare and contrast between both the companies. They reflected on the task, drew two columns and made notes of their observations.
Abstract Conceptualization	Students combined their work from CE and RO and wrote a comparative essay of 1000 words only. The information was derived from the table that they created with similarities and differences between the two companies in the previous stage of the lesson. They were required to use transition and linking words in their essay. This task took 20 minutes to complete. After completion, the essay was numbered and swapped with other groups for peer-correction. Students were very critical in correcting the other group's work and awarded marks as per the marking criteria are given by the teacher. The essays were returned to the groups to see their scores, and it was collected by the teacher to re-check once again.
Active Experimentation	With all the logical reasoning, analysis and evaluations made from CE, RO and AC, students were ready to apply their knowledge to the module assignment, which was a business report. It was a take-home assignment with two weeks to

	complete the task. The report required them to research on the two given companies and then to compare and contrast.

Teachers' Reflections on the activity:

Writing a business report is a challenging task for students. In the previous semester, they wrote a literature review-based assignment, but this was a completely different genre. Writing skill in itself is a skill that is often unpopular with students. However, applying the experiential cycle method to this task made it informative and enjoyable and achieved the learning outcome. Since the case studies were taken from real - life scenarios, the case studies created enthusiasm in students as they felt they could contribute to the given factual information and at times were surprised to discover the weakness of the company. The peer-correction activity was very beneficial as students were able to evaluate each other's work and by grading the essay, they were aware of the marking criteria. With less interference from the teacher, students understood the task and required no explanation of the module assignment. The teacher monitored students' progress within the activities and clarified any uncertainties that arose.

4. Analysis and Discussion of results

To determine the impact of the experiential learning tasks on long term retention of the content covered during the semester, both groups post - test scores were analysed using t-test procedure.

The pre-test means of both groups were close to zero, hence it was considered insignificant to be used as a comparison with the post-test. In order to investigate whether the difference between the experimental and control groups in the post-test is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was run using spss.

4.1 Research question 1- What is the impact of experiential learning cycle on long term knowledge retention.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Experimental	31	8.2226	2.40121	.43127
Control Group	31	6.7355	2.41434	.43363

df	T	Sig.
60	2.4	p<.05

Table 2 – Statistical results of the delayed post-test

The results indicated that the difference between the two groups is statistically significant, $t(60) = 2.4$, $p<.001$. The statistics reveal that experimental group which undertook the treatment displayed higher rates of retention of content despite the long duration between the pre-test and the post-test. It is surprising that despite the influence of external factors like lack of exposure to the content for three months, students still exhibited retention of

the information. This finding is in disagreement with the findings of Montgomery & Millenbah (2011),which revealed that there was no significant difference in knowledge retention between the experimental and control group.

On the other hand, the lower rate of retention of knowledge displayed by the control group indicates that superficial learning of the content for temporary purposes, such as exam oriented study, would not support knowledge retention nor transfer of skills.

The positive outcome of the intervention could be attributed to the experiential learning tasks guided the learner through all stages of the experiential learning process. These tasks allowed students to engage actively with the new experience, recreate concepts, reflect on the learning process and acknowledge the relevance of the content to real life experiences. In the current study, experiential learning tasks have proved significant in expediting knowledge retention.

4.2 Research question 2 - Which type of knowledge is retained after a duration of 3 months. Is it procedural knowledge or declarative knowledge?
To know where the difference lies, an in-depth analysis of the t-test of each section in the table below would reveal the areas of significance in procedural and declarative knowledge.

Type of knowledge	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Procedural	experimental	31	3.2323	1.17428	.21091
	control	31	2.2032	1.07718	.19347
Declarative	experimental	31	4.8419	1.88623	.33878
	control	31	4.4677	2.10925	.37883

Table 3- Post-test section - wise statistical analysis

t	Df	sig (two-tailed)
3.59	60	p<.05

Table 3 a) Independent samples t-test for the **procedural knowledge**
The t-value is 3.59548. The p-value is .000328. The result is significant at p < .05.

t	Df	sig (two-tailed)
0.73	60	0.46

Table 3 b) Independent samples t-test for the **declarative knowledge**

The t-value is 0.73629. The p-value is .232212. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.
In order to get a clarification on the interpretation of the results, it is imperative to recall the two types of knowledge that were intended to the assessed. As quoted by Alexander & Judy (1988), "declarative knowledge refers to factual information (knowing what), whereas procedural knowledge is the compilation of declarative knowledge into functional units that incorporate domain-specific strategies (knowing how). Section 1 and 2 consisted of multiple- choice questions which tested student's factual information on SWOT analysis and the components of a Business Report.
Sections 3 and 4 contained questions that tested students on the procedures of group meetings and interviews. Considering the experimental group, we can infer from the above results that the intervention had no effect on students' retention of declarative knowledge but showed an impact on procedural knowledge. In other words, students displayed weak memorisation skills but retained the hands on- 'know how' learning experiences. The simulation tasks of group meeting and interviews enabled students to gain a deeper understanding of the content. The higher rate of retention of procedural knowledge indicates that knowledge that is thoroughly structured in the memory is retrieved at the time of application in a given situation.

Kohonen (1992)26) states that there is no assurance of success that materials and tasks develop successful learners if learners are not involved in utilizing the input to produce an effective output. The significance of reinforcement has been emphasized by behaviorists, which is relevant in the current scenario, particularly applicable in an EFL context where the learner is liable to forget the target language due to lack of exposure. Meaningful association made between classroom materials and real-world situations aid in retaining procedural knowledge.

5. Implications for teaching

Teachers are delighted when students recall content taught the previous day. It is vice versa when silence prevails and the only voice heard is that of the teacher. Quite often, the staff room is a place to release the frustration when despite long hours of lecturing, students do not retain the content taught.
The teachers' role is significant in this process. From being a facilitator, the educator takes on the role of a subject expert, by either lecturing or providing texts. When students are able to analyse the subject critically, the educator designs activities that assist learners to evaluate their learning. At the final mode of the learning cycle, the educator dons the role of a coach who works collaboratively, coaching students on how to apply the knowledge to real life scenarios (A. Y. Kolb et al., 2014). The instructional activities should be planned in a way to enable learners to decide their own learning goals and apply appropriate strategies to face language challenges. Most classrooms provide a rigid and authoritarian formal environment where learning within the class seems to be monotonous, irrelevant and lifeless.

This research has several practical applications. Firstly, it points to the selection of appropriate instructional methods and approaches to learning. Tasks should generate awareness of language strategies and the language process. Above all, the teacher should be willing to be a part of the whole teaching and learning process. Secondly, experiential learning is nothing but' learning by doing'. This should be kept in mind while providing learners with tasks that relate to reality. When tasks are relevant and contextualized,

students are motivated to participate in the activity. Garcia and Pintrich (1992) cited in (Travers & Sheckley, 2000) report that students who worked collaboratively developed better skills than the ones taught in a traditional setting with teacher lecturing and students sitting passively. High collaborative tasks develop 'self-regulation strategies such as higher goal orientation, better rehearsal strategies, higher elaboration of ideas, and better internal calibration when making decisions'.

The experiential learning approach provides learners with opportunities to personally interact with each other's experiences and engage in active learning. As stated by Kolb, 'knowledge is created by the transformation of experiences,' reflection plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between theory and experience. The learner's role in the experiential learning cycle is not just a passive learner, watching and thinking but an active learner who directly participates in the learning process.

The current study was conducted with Business students who were enrolled in different pathways. It would be rewarding for lecturers if they could embed the experiential learning cycle in their content modules, thus creating opportunities for students to enhance their learning strategies. It is also wise to make students aware of existing strategies at the outset and make them conscious of potential strategies that they have not attempted before. Although the study implemented the experiential learning cycle in the course, it is recommended that educators experiment with various communicative teaching methods. (Oxford, 2001))calls for an integrated approach in teaching language skills in the classroom.

6. Conclusion

Despite being a widely accepted and experimented theory of learning, Kolb's Learning Cycle should be carefully considered before applying it to the learning context. The curriculum of every institution is customised as per the requirements of the job market, in such cases, a fully planned experiential learning programme is advisable but not mandatory.

The contribution of this study has been to confirm that experiential learning cycle facilitates retention of knowledge. Several studies conducted in Oman had emphasized that the memorization of facts is the most preferred strategy by Omani students, however, in this study, it indicates a different story. Students have proved to be poor in remembering facts, and retention of information was more in-depth with tasks where there was maximum engagement in groups, such as simulations of group meeting and interviews. This certainly substantiates the results obtained on the delayed post-test. In the age of technology, where everything is accessible at the click of a button, recall of memory remains dormant.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) rightly puts in the role of teachers 'as creators of learning opportunities'. Primarily the teacher utilizes the classroom situations to reflect and modify the lessons based on the feedback received from students. According to Kumaravadivelu, teachers can achieve this only 'if teachers treat a predetermined syllabus as a pre-syllabus that is to be reconstructed to meet specific learner needs, wants, and situations and treat a prescribed text as a pretext that is to be used as a springboard for launching classroom activities'.

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Fostering Critical Thinking Skills in EAP Learners

Moin Amena

Abstract

The paper begins with a brief history of critical thinking, identifies the challenges associated with the teaching of critical thinking skills to EAP learners and provides various definitions of critical thinking. The paper illustrates a variety of pedagogical strategies to develop critical thinking skills by integrating Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach in English for Business (EfB1) courses at the Centre for Preparatory Studies, Sultan Qaboos University. The paper emphasises 'collaboration' and 'critical reflections' as the core processes that promote active learning.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Problem-Based Learning, English for Business, critical reflections

A brief history of critical thinking skills

The origin of critical thinking dates back to Socrates's period (about 2500 years ago) when he stressed the importance of 'thinking' and the need for asking 'deep questions' popularly known as 'Socratic questioning.' Socrates questioned common beliefs that were devoid of evidence or rational foundation. This practice was taken further by Plato, who explored 'deeper realities' through systematic thinking. In the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas encouraged 'systematic reasoning' and 'cross-examining.' The 15th and 16th centuries witnessed the importance of 'analysis and critique' (Seebohm, 2013) and Bacon's books are considered the earliest texts on critical thinking. Descartes, in France, projected the idea of 'systematic doubt,' and Machiavelli introduced 'critical political thought.' In the 16th and 17th centuries, Locke and Hobbes stressed the importance of 'evidence and reasoning.' In the 17th and 18th centuries, Boyle and Newton promoted 'intellectual freedom and critical thought' (Paul, Linda and Ted, 1997).'

In contrast, Montesquieu, Voltaire and Diderot valued the importance of 'serious analysis and critique'. In the 18th century, Smith and Kant's works propagated the 'power of critical thought', and in the 19th century, the work of Comte and Spencer, Marx, Darwin and Freud encouraged critical thinking in the fields of social life, economic life, science and languages respectively. In the 20th century, Sumner encouraged critical thinking in life and education and thus introduced the concept of 'socio-centric thinking' of the human mind and proposed schools as 'servers of social indoctrination.' In recent times, in the field of education, contributions from Dewey, Wittgenstein and Piaget have enhanced our understanding of 'human thought' 'conscious realisation.'

In short, as discussed above, critical thinking has a history of 2500 years where philosophers, thinkers, writers, educationists and scientists have contributed profusely to the development of the present field of study called critical thinking. It is now being studied, researched, taught and assessed across every human study discipline.

Critical thinking skills in education and challenges

With the rapidly changing world, the focus has shifted on our educational system. There is an increasing demand for educational institutions to produce learners equipped with 21st-century skills – also known as 'transversal skills, logical skills, non-academic skills, soft skills, etc. These skills emphasise the importance of 'applying knowledge' in the real world to succeed. This pedagogical shift from acquiring knowledge to skill-based approach in education has led to the development of various frameworks, defining 21st-century skills. Some such frameworks available in the literature are the P21 framework, ETS ICT framework, NAEP, OECD, NETS, En Gauge, etc. However, in all these frameworks, the most common element is 'critical thinking skills.' All these frameworks recognise the importance of fostering, teaching and assessing critical thinking skills.

This realisation, however, is ingrained with a few challenges when incorporated in school/college curricula. Some of them are as follows:

- How should critical thinking skills be taught, assessed and evaluated?
- Should critical thinking skills be part of curricula across all disciplines with its standalone goals and objectives?
- Should critical thinking skills be integrated into each subject taught?

Even after addressing these questions, we face another set of challenges, which are pedagogical. These challenges are at three sub-levels:

Definitional challenge

Before making critical thinking skills a part of curricula, there is a need for an overarching definition of critical thinking skills. However, we lack any such concrete definition. Traditionally, critical thinking involves questioning, challenging the accepted knowledge and wisdom objectively from our values and perspectives (Judge, Brenda; McCreery, Elaine; Jones, Patrick, 2009). However, other elements such as reflection, creativity and ambiguity have been included to define critical thinking. Scriven (1996) defines critical thinking as "… the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualising, applying, analysing, synthesising, and evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning or communication, as a guide to belief and action".

Operational challenge

Having established a set of definitions of critical thinking skills for a particular educational system, operationalising them is equally important. To this end, materials, teaching styles, teacher-student readiness/training need to be revisited.

Systemic challenge

Once the above two challenges are resolved, there is a need to ensure that the right assessment tools are exploited to assess critical thinking skills to avoid a mismatch between 'what is taught' and 'what is tested. In many educational systems, the curriculum is designed based on the philosophy of critical thinking, but their testing system continues

to use the traditional mode of testing, where transfer of knowledge is assessed instead of testing the ability to conceptualise, analyse and justify.

Defining critical thinking skills

Critical thinking affects our lives in numerous ways as it regulates our actions. It is about' how' we think rather than 'what' we think; it further puts to test any evidence for believing something. It is mostly interpreted as a process to reason and make sensible, informed decisions, reflect on the decisions taken, make evaluations and draw conclusions based on evidence and justifications.

The literature review on the definition of critical thinking skills reveals a lack of consensus among researchers and educators on providing one single overarching definition. In an attempt to give a better understanding of what is meant by critical thinking, the author offers a range of definitions available in the literature.

According to Pascarella & Terenzini (1991), critical thinking involves questioning. It includes identifying central issues, recognising relationships, making judgments and conclusions, and evaluating conclusions based on credibility. There are several interpretations and definitions of critical thinking. Kurfiss (1988) states that "critical thinking is a rational response to questions that cannot be answered definitively." She further elaborates that critical thinking explores a situation, phenomenon, question, or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion by integrating all available information". Wade (1995) proposes eight critical thinking elements: asking questions, defining a problem, examining evidence, analysing assumptions and prejudices, avoiding emotional reasoning and oversimplification, and tolerating ambiguity. Interestingly, Strohm & Baukus (1995) also see ambiguity as an essential part of critical thinking as they say, "Ambiguity and doubt serve a critical-thinking function and are necessary and even a productive part of the process."

The most comprehensive definition of critical thinking skills is provided by Facione (1990). He identified six specific attributes of critical thinking skills: interpretation–clarifying meaning, analysis–examining arguments, evaluation–assigning value to claims, inference–drawing conclusions, explanation–presenting arguments, and self-regulation–self-examining biases. Thus most formal definitions characterise critical thinking as the intentional application of analytical, higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, problem recognition and problem-solving, inference, and evaluation" (Angelo, 1995). To summarise, critical thinking is perceived as a benchmark to raise the quality of everything we do. Essentially, critical thinking is an organised way an individual thinks to assess the validity of any news articles, documentaries, statements, or research (Beyer, 1995)

Developing critical thinking skills through Problem Based Learning (PBL)

Problem-based learning is a learner-centered, an inquiry-based instructional model where the students learn about a subject by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem (Nilson, 2010). PBL, according to Duch et al. (2001) is, "a teaching method in which complex real-world problems are used as the vehicle to promote student learning of

concepts and principles as opposed to direct presentation of facts and concepts". In this approach, the problem is the starting point of the learning process (Graff and Kolmos, 2003). In PBL, Wood (2006) believes students engage in complex, challenging problems and collaboratively work toward their resolution. PBL helps connect disciplinary knowledge to real-world problems—the motivation to solve a problem becomes the motivation to learn.

Research shows that PBL stimulates students' critical thinking, especially reasoning skills (Hmelo-Silver and Ferrari, 1997). It finds support in a study conducted by Derry et al. (2000), which shows learners improved their reasoning ability in a PBL course. Similarly, Tiwari et al. (2006) and Iwaoka et al. (2010) show that the PBL approach enhances students' critical thinking skills.

Based on Facione's (2006) conceptual definition (discussed earlier) and Hmelo-Silver (2004), it can be assumed that a group brainstorming session in PBL nurtures the critical thinking ability of students as they critically consider possible solutions for the problem at hand. Wee (2004) demonstrates that a teacher as a facilitator aids students to make decisions, thereby enhancing their metacognitive thinking. Moreover, different elements of the PBL process such as sharing, debating, supporting peers, discussing, etc., produce an environment conducive to the development of critical thinking (Wee 2004). Savery and Duffy (2001) demonstrate that interaction, reflection and feedback help students' critical thinking.

In short, with the teacher as a facilitator, PBL can be considered as an integrated approach to teaching critical thinking through problems. Empirical evidence has proved the success of problem-based learning as an approach to teach content and critical thinking, self-directed learning, and collaboration (Jones, 2008; Sendag & Odabasi, 2009).

Critical thinking in English for business courses

As discussed above, the research supports the fact that the PBL approach augments critical thinking. English for business courses at the Centre for Preparatory Studies (CPS), Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) propels critical thinking by various significant and active learning processes. In English for Business 1, problem-based learning is exploited to trigger and foster critical thinking skills. The learners are challenged with an economic or business or management problem, where there is no one right answer. The answer is not readily available to learners, so it forces them to think out of the box, use analytical thinking and arrive at a consensus in a collaborative environment. The learners typically follow a sequence where they identify and define the problem, investigate the probable causes and effects, research strategies to combat the problem and finally decide on the optimal strategy with justifications. Based on their research, the learners formulate solutions to the given problem and provide justifications.

Ways to develop critical thinking skills

In the recent past, teaching critical thinking skills has become a vital aspect of any educational system. According to Paul et al. (1990), critical thinking skills need to be taught explicitly and operationalised in a classroom setting.

It requires continual and constant reinforcement through a variety of instructional techniques. The problem-based learning approach in English for Business 1 (EfB1) at

SQU employs various strategies (as supported in the literature discussed above) to develop learners' critical thinking skills. Some of them are discussed below.

Providing a conducive environment:

A conducive environment must be provided to learners to foster critical thinking skills (Mathews and Lowe, 2011). While discussing economics and business-related topics in English for Business 1 (EfB1), the students are encouraged to openly express a range of ideas and exhibit respect for the ideas expressed. As they read a newspaper/magazine article or listen to a news documentary, they ask questions to cultivate critical thinking skills.

Conducting debates

Another popular strategy to encourage students to think critically is to debate oral or written form in the classroom environment (Healey, 2012). EfB1 students encounter conflicting accounts of arguments in debates helping them develop their critical thinking. They also watch online debates (for example, the final round in the World Scholars' Cup), which is an excellent way to inspire and promote critical thinking skills.

Introducing cooperative learning strategies

According to Cooper (1995), collaborative learning facilitates critical thinking. "In properly structured cooperative learning environments, students perform more of the active, critical thinking with continuous support and feedback from other students and the teacher" (Cooper, 1995). As EfB1, students engage in collaborative work to complete their tasks both inside and outside the classroom, they communicate with each other and the teacher, which helps them cultivate critical thinking skills. Some other ways of incorporating collaborative activities involve peer-teaching, debates and class/group discussions led by the learners. Thus, this approach lends itself easily to collaborative work activities.

Using case studies

McDade (1995) perceives this technique as fostering critical thinking when a business case study or story is presented to the learners without the climax or the conclusion. The learners are forced to think deeply, weigh the pros and cons and write various endings for the story/ case study through a discussion. In EfB1, students read case studies and answer comprehension questions based on higher-order thinking skills. They employ critical thinking skills such as discussing, debating, reasoning and evaluating to show how these case studies fit into their local contexts.

Using conference style learning

EfB1 learners search for material, (relevant to the problem under discussion) read, analyse and come prepared to the class for discussion. In class, they work in teams annotating, paraphrasing, discussing, taking notes, summarising and synthesising on specific vital questions. Each group reports to the class on one aspect of their discussion. Underwood & Wald (1995) show that in-group discussions of PBL, the other group members are involved in a short, interactive question-answer session and "build on each

other's ideas." This ability to construct ideas collaboratively is one of the elements of critical thinking skills.

Asking questions

It is important to teach students how to think critically and ask the right questions to continue the advancement of the very fields we are teaching. "Every field stays alive only to the extent that fresh questions are generated and taken seriously" (Center for Critical Thinking, 1996a). EfB1 employs this strategy to stimulate students to generate questions by assigning them with content reading to write and email questions before class time. These queries then form the discussion to promote critical thinking in EfB1 learners.

Writing assignments

Writing inside and outside the walls of a classroom is vital to broadening learners' thinking. Wade (1995) sees the use of writing as vital to developing critical thinking skills. "With written assignments, an instructor can encourage the development of dialectic reasoning by requiring students to argue both [or more] sides of an issue" (Wade, p. 24). EfB1 course requires students to read materials relevant to the 'problem under discussion', and they write on different aspects such as suggested solutions on the given problem.

Using scenarios

Dolmans et al. (1997) show seven different problem design principles or scenarios, which encourage critical thinking. EfB1 students are given different scenarios of general or specific economic, management, or business-related problems in small groups. Students identify controversies in the scenarios and suggest ways to solve the problem after analysing them from different participants' views.

Using critical reflections

Exploiting reflections to promote critical thinking is termed as "critical reflections." Critical reflection is considered an important human activity that helps learners revisit their experience, think deeply about it and evaluate it (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). In critical reflections, the students think deeply about the subject matter and make personal connections with the content. In the English for Business 1 course, learners are given specific writing prompts, where they articulate what was right and what they would do differently based on their recent experience of accomplishing certain milestones paced at different stages of the learning process. Weissinger (2004) shows that self-reflection develops students' critical thinking ability as learners become aware of their thinking.

Conclusion

Critical thinking is a popular concept that has grown significantly in the EAP classroom over the last decade. This paper establishes the importance of critical thinking skills and the way they are fostered through a problem-based learning approach. To this end, the case of English for Business 1- an EAP course at Sultan Qaboos University has been discussed. The paper has also attempted to discuss how instruction in the classroom is designed to foster critical thinking skills among EfB1 learners. It has shown a variety of practical teaching strategies that foster critical thinking skills through the PBL approach.

It shows how PBL is used to discuss economics and business-related problems, through which learners discover new knowledge based on their prerequisite knowledge in order to solve the problem. PBL approach provides them with a platform to identify innovative solutions to the problems at hand. They use their critical thinking skills like searching for new knowledge, brainstorming, identifying, reasoning, classifying, thinking analytically, presenting, debating, synthesising, writing, etc. This paper demonstrates that if incorporated in the curriculum, PBL can help foster critical thinking skills.

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